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THE HAWTHORNE CLASSICS

ENGLISH STORIES

EDITED BY

EDWARD EVERETT HALE, JR., PH.D.

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH IN UNION COLLEGE



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INTRODUCTION

IT has been sometimes said that the short story is an especially American form of literature,—that Hawthorne and Poe were the first to show what could be done in a few pages of narrative, and that while other nations have certainly produced masterpieces, Henry James and Bret Harte are still equal in their kind to any one else. Without trying to settle any such question as this,—there are first-rate short stories in every language,—it may be said that we do not find many fine short stories in English literature until almost our own day. In the eighteenth century there were not a few tales, but they had, as a rule, few of the qualities that we have got used to considering as essential to a really fine short story. Sir Walter Scott's "Wandering Willie's Tale" in "Redgauntlet" gives us a good notion of what the old-fashioned tale was. It is a story told around rather a slight basis, much like "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,"¹ and quite unlike the more carefully worked-out stories of Hawthorne or Poe, or of Stevenson or Kipling lately, with their definite effect and their harmony of artistic

¹ See "American Stories," p. ix.

effort. In writing of short stories in another volume in this series,¹ we said that the short story had one dominant motive or idea, and that to present this idea was the chief purpose of the author, and added that this motive would be of various kinds. In the older tale this motive was generally the story itself; but sometimes even the story was of slight importance, merely an opportunity for the play of thought and sentiment, and in this respect not unlike the essay. The modern story has a much more definite idea; the story is rarely told for itself alone. Sometimes its motive is a true idea, as in a good many of Hawthorne's stories, an idea of which the substance could almost be put in a shorter, more definite statement. Sometimes it is the development of some thought, some theory, some intellectual process we might say, as in a detective story, or "The Gold Bug" of Poe. Sometimes, of course, its motive is but an incident, an adventure, attractive in itself and illustrative of manners and life. It is often the development of some quaint or interesting character, often it is a pure situation, in some set of circumstances, that is, in which the deep and human feeling of the characters is brought forth.

Of all these different developments of the idea of the short story later English literature has good examples. The development of ideas was the con-

¹ "American Stories," p. xi.

stant occupation of Charles Dickens. Although his mind was always busy with character, humor, plot, yet he had power left for some generous thought which would be for the good of men. So his novels very often have some radical or reformatory purpose in them; "Bleak House" is an arraignment of the interminable processes of the Court of Chancery, "Little Dorrit" of the red tape of government service and the misery of the debtor's prison, "Hard Times" of the hypocritical hardness of the business man. Dickens generally had some idea in mind, and his way was to embody it in a story.

Of these stories none are more characteristic of Dickens than his Christmas stories. They represent in various forms the ideas that were at the bottom of his simple philosophy of life. They are not novels, but then they are not exactly short stories, because they are not very short. They were written to be published as Christmas books; a novel like the rest of Dickens's would have been too long, a true short story too short. So they are hardly short stories in the true sense of the word. But they are built up on the plan of the short story; each is the presentation of some single idea generally at considerable length and in some detail of illustration. It happens that one of them, however, is better suited to our purpose. The "Christmas Carol" was the first and most popular of these stories, and Dickens had frequent

requests to read it in public. It was too long, however, for one reading, and therefore Dickens omitted enough to bring it within the limits of an evening's reading. The result is that we have something of about the length of many a short story.

The omissions and changes that Dickens made in the "Christmas Carol" were of two kinds, first those by which he made the story shorter without changing the representation of the idea, and, second, those that he made with a view to reading the story aloud. An example of the first is the omission in Stave First of everything relating to Marley's chain; in the original story Marley had a chain about his waist made of "cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel." Dickens plays on the idea that the attention paid in life to material things hangs as a clog on the soul in death; when Scrooge looks out of the window he sees many phantoms wearing chains like Marley's Ghost, especially "one old ghost in a white waist-coat with a monstrous iron safe attached to his ankle." All this Dickens omitted for reading, and probably the story is the better for it; the idea was a little beside the point, the humor was a little thin, the idea of the story is as strong without it. Other omissions of this kind are necessary, but not so good; some descriptions very characteristic of Dickens, some of the visions which the

spirits show to Scrooge have to be omitted for want of space. Still the result strengthens the story on the whole; the impression is surer by being made in a manner more concise.

The other set of omissions we have as a rule not retained in this edition. They are those that Dickens made with a view to effective reading. Thus in many paragraphs a phrase or two will be omitted, because in the dramatic way in which Dickens read they were unnecessary or even harmful to the effect. Thus phrases like "said Scrooge" are almost invariably left out. This kind of omission we restore, for in this edition one is to read the story not listen to it, and the reader who has not before him some one who is presenting the matter dramatically, appreciates little matters that to the hearer would be a hindrance.

The "*Christmas Carol*," then, in its shorter form gives us a story ordered and designed to carry out an idea. The awful result of closing one's heart to human sympathy; the genial life diffused by those natures that readily reach out to join with others; Christmas time as the type of a life of love and good feeling. This is the thought that filled Dickens's mind. To present it he took a fantastic form appropriate to the season of unrestrained jollity. The miser Scrooge is led here and there by beneficent Christmas spirits, and shown the evil of his own narrow,

enclosed life and the joy and delight of other lives which have for their aim not the mere acquisition of so much gold or other material wealth, but the coming into contact with the lives of others, to share their happiness and aid their distress. To this end everything in the story is directed, even down to single words and little phrases. Whatever will make the life of Scrooge seem mean, sordid, and evil, whatever will make the Cratchits, the Fezziwigs, Scrooge's nephew's family seem joyous, happy, delightful, that finds its place in the story. Sometimes it is a description, as that of the Spirit of Christmas Past and of Christmas morning on page 30; sometimes it is the incident, as in the contrasted accounts of Serooge at school (p. 22) and of the Fezziwigs' festivity (p. 25); sometimes it is a few words, as in the string of adjectives on page 2, and again on page 5; sometimes it is but a single word, as the repeated "melancholy" on page 9. Everything goes to strengthen the general effect. Not that this is a sermon. To the critical readers bent on searching out Dickens's thoughts and Dickens's methods, much seems readily to be here or there with this or that purpose, much seems to be the statement of an idea. But the uncritical reader will rarely think of these things, and Dickens as he wrote probably did not think of them. The idea worked itself out, as the saying is; the mind directed in one

course, thought naturally of incident, description, phrase, and the story took the true form; it embodied in artistic form the thought which dominated its author.

Somewhat different is our extract from Bulwer. The "Christmas Carol" is in some respects like "The Great Stone Face" by Hawthorne; each story is the presentation in various forms (and in different ways) of a moral idea. "The House and the Brain" reminds us of Fitz-James O'Brien's "Diamond Lens." Each is a fantastic development of the scientific ideas of the time. The idea of a diamond lens is undoubtedly an impossibility, but not more than the influence of a secret chamber with vials of strange liquid. In each case the author had some conception arising from the scientific ideas of his day, and in each case he expressed himself in the form of a story, in each case telling of the most remarkable things as if they were the most simple occurrences. The story is interesting in itself,—probably the first part will remain longest in mind,—but when it was written it was undoubtedly the expression of the vague, mysterious conceptions that were so fascinating to Bulwer, as they have been to not a few after him.

Something a little different have we in the story by Ouida, called "A Dog of Flanders." It is not precisely a story of any especial event, or rather it would be somewhat extended at the beginning

for such a story. It is really the presentation of a phase of life, the presentation in a very poignant form of the situation of the artistic nature in the midst of surroundings that cannot and will not understand it. In spite of the name of the story, Patrasche is not the real hero, but Nello. And all else, the local color, as the artists call it, the quaint old atmosphere of the Flemish country, the characters in the story, even to the great honest dog himself, even in fact the pathetic ending, all these are means to effect the end, an end which any reader of the longer novels of the author will readily recognize.

Robert Louis Stevenson was in love with adventure, and although he often wrote of other things and indeed thought seriously and earnestly of life, yet it was adventure at bottom which most attracted him and absorbed his mind. He did not care much where the adventure was, in the Scotland that he so loved, in some great city where the complex life was so fascinating, in the islands of the South Sea wherein he worked a sort of revival of romance, wherever it was, he loved the strange and stirring incident. But even Stevenson's stories are not stories wholly for themselves alone, for he always wished also to give the spirit and character of the time and place, the romantic tone as one might say. Old France, the France of the time of Villon and Froissart, was one of his early delights, and in our story he gives

an adventure such as he might almost have found in the later pages of Brantôme.

Mr. Kipling is a man of such varied genius that it is not worth while to try to exemplify his manner as a story writer by any one story. His stories are of many kinds as they are of many subjects. "Wee Willie Winkie" is, however, as characteristic as any; it has what is called atmosphere and local color, as all Kipling's Indian stories have; it has its exciting adventure as his stories very generally have; but neither of these things is the main point. The main point is the glimpse it gives us of the soul of that six-year-old "child of a dominant race," who was striving to be a man. Wee Willie Winkie, in spite of his childishness, — his child's talk and his child's tears, — was at bottom a man, the kind of man that, as Kipling likes to think, makes the British Empire, resolute in feeling for duty, indifferent to danger, decided in dealing with necessity, and by hook or crook successful. Such is the child, and such, in many of Kipling's stories, is the man. This story merely gives us a glimpse, but in that glimpse we see clearly what is there.

These stories are all alike in the one respect mentioned, that each seeks to make upon the reader one strong impression, a lesson, an idea, a situation, an incident, a character. But that very likeness should bring out to us more strongly the characteristic difference that there is between these

story-writers. Each one doubtless we should enjoy thoroughly as we read it, but as we look them over together we realize more surely the strong geniality of Dickens, the sentiment of mystery in Bulwer, the atmosphere of artistic feeling that Ouida loved, the stirring life of chivalry and sentiment in Stevenson, and the outspoken truth of Kipling.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

BY CHARLES DICKENS

STAVE ONE

MARLEY'S GHOST

MARLEY was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it. And Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change¹ for anything he chose to put his hand to.

Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Scrooge knew he was dead ? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise ? Scrooge and he were partners for I don't know how many years. Scrooge was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend, and sole mourner.

¹ The Exchange or gathering place of merchants. Even in Addison's time it was a regular expression. "I have been taken for a merchant upon the Exchange for above these ten years," he says in the first number of the "Spectator": "English Essays," p. 70. In fact the Royal Exchange was founded in 1565.

Scrooge never painted out Old Marley's name. There it stood, years afterwards, above the warehouse door : Scrooge and Marley. The firm was known as Scrooge and Marley. Sometimes people new to the business called Scrooge Scrooge, and sometimes Marley, but he answered to both names. It was all the same to him.

Oh ! but he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge ! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner !

External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, no wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he, no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose, no pelting rain less open to entreaty. Foul weather didn't know where to have him. The heaviest rain, and snow, and hail, and sleet, could boast of the advantage over him in only one respect. They often "came down"¹ handsomely, and Scrooge never did.

Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, with gladsome looks, " My dear Scrooge, how are you ? When will you come to see me ? " No beggars implored him to bestow a trifle, no children asked him what it was o'clock, no man or woman ever once in all his life inquired the way to such and such a place, of Scrooge. Even the blind-men's dogs appeared to know him ; and, when they saw him coming on, would tug their

¹ An old slang phrase for " give something. "

owners into doorways and up courts ; and then would wag their tails as though they said, “ No eye at all is better than an evil eye, dark master ! ”

But what did Scrooge care ? It was the very thing he liked. To edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance, was what the knowing ones call “ nuts ”¹ to Scrooge.

Once upon a time,—of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve,—old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather, foggy withal, and he could hear the people in the court outside go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breasts, and stamping their feet upon the pavement stones to warm them. The city clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark² already.

The door of Scrooge’s counting-house was open, that he might keep his eye upon his clerk, who, in a dismal little cell beyond, a sort of tank, was copying letters. Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk’s fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal. But he couldn’t replenish it, for Scrooge kept the coal-box in his own room; and so surely as the clerk came in with the shovel, the master predicted that it would be necessary

¹ Slang for anything especially agreeable.

² London is so far north that the winter days are short at best. But in London is also much smoke, and a yellow or brown fog, which is mentioned here, so that there is not much daylight in winter.

for them to part. Wherefore the clerk put on his white comforter, and tried to warm himself at the candle ; in which effort, not being a man of a strong imagination, he failed.

“A merry Christmas, uncle ! God save you !” cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge’s nephew, who came upon him so quickly that this was the first intimation he had of his approach.

“ Bah ! ” said Scrooge. “ Humbug ! ”

“Christmas a humbug, uncle ! ” said Scrooge’s nephew. “ You don’t mean that, I am sure ? ”

“I do,” said Scrooge. “Out upon merry Christmas ! What’s Christmas-time to you but a time for paying bills without money ; a time for finding yourself a year older, and not an hour richer ; a time for balancing your books, and having every item in ‘em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you ? If I could work my will,” said Scrooge, indignantly, “every idiot who goes about with ‘Merry Christmas’ on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart. He should ! ”

“ Uncle ! ” pleaded the nephew.

“ Nephew,” returned the uncle, sternly, “keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine.”

“ Keep it ! ” repeated Scrooge’s nephew. “ But you don’t keep it.”

"Let me leave it alone, then. Much good may it do you ! Much good it has ever done you !"

"There are many things from which I might have derived good by which I have not profited, I dare say," returned the nephew, "Christmas among the rest. But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas-time, when it has come round,—apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that,—as a good time ; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time ; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it *has* done me good, and *will* do me good ; and I say, God bless it !"

The clerk in the tank involuntarily applauded.

"Let me hear another sound from *you*," said Scrooge, "and you'll keep your Christmas by losing your situation. You're quite a powerful speaker, sir," he added, turning to his nephew. "I wonder you don't go into Parliament."

"Don't be angry, uncle. Come ! Dine with us to-morrow."

Scrooge said that he would see him — Yes,

indeed, he did. He went the whole length of the expression, and said that he would see him in that extremity first.

“But why?” cried Scrooge’s nephew. “Why?”

“Why did you get married?” said Scrooge.

“Because I fell in love.”

“Because you fell in love!” growled Scrooge, as if that were the only one thing in the world more ridiculous than a merry Christmas. “Good afternoon!”

“Nay, uncle, but you never came to see me before that happened. Why give it as a reason for not coming now?”

“Good afternoon.”

“I want nothing from you; I ask nothing of you; why cannot we be friends?”

“Good afternoon!”

“I am sorry, with all my heart, to find you so resolute. We have never had any quarrel, to which I have been a party. But I have made the trial in homage to Christmas, and I’ll keep my Christmas humor to the last. So A Merry Christmas, uncle!”

“Good afternoon.”

“And A Happy New Year!”

“Good afternoon!”

His nephew left the room without an angry word, notwithstanding.

The clerk, in letting Scrooge’s nephew out, had let two other people in. They were portly gentle-

men, pleasant to behold, and now stood, with their hats off, in Scrooge's office. They had books and papers in their hands, and bowed to him.

"Scrooge and Marley's, I believe," said one of the gentlemen, referring to his list. "Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge, or Mr. Marley?"

"Mr. Marley has been dead these seven years," Scrooge replied. "He died seven years ago, this very night."

"At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge," said the gentleman, taking up a pen, "it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common necessities; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir."

"Are there no prisons?"

"Plenty of prisons. But under the impression that they scarcely furnish Christian cheer of mind or body to the multitude," returned the gentleman, "a few of us are endeavoring to raise a fund to buy the poor some meat and drink, and means of warmth. We choose this time, because it is a time, of all others, when Want is keenly felt, and Abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for?"

"Nothing!" Scrooge replied.

"You wish to be anonymous?"

"I wish to be left alone," said Scrooge. "Since you ask me what I wish, gentlemen, that is my answer. I don't make merry myself at Christmas, and I can't afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the prisons and the workhouses¹—they cost enough—and those who are badly off must go there."

"Many can't go there; and many would rather die."

"If they would rather die," said Scrooge, "they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. Good afternoon, gentlemen."

At length the hour of shutting up the counting-house arrived. With an ill-will Scrooge dismounted from his stool, and tacitly admitted the fact to the expectant clerk in the tank, who instantly snuffed his candle out, and put on his hat.

"You'll want all day to-morrow, I suppose?" said Scrooge.

"If quite convenient, sir."

"It's not convenient," said Scrooge, "and it's not fair. If I was to stop half-a-crown for it, you'd think yourself mightily ill used, I'll be bound?"

"Yes, sir."

"And yet," said Scrooge, "you don't think *me* ill used when I pay a day's wages for no work."

¹ A workhouse is a sort of poor-house: cf. p. 71. The workhouses and the prisons are supported by taxes.

"It's only once a year, sir."

"A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December!" said Scrooge, buttoning his great coat to the chin. "But I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here all the earlier next morning."

The clerk promised that he would; and Scrooge walked out with a growl. The office was closed in a twinkling, and the clerk, with the long ends of his white comforter dangling below his waist (for he boasted no great-coat), went down a slide, at the end of a lane of boys, twenty times, in honor of its being Christmas Eve, and then ran home, as hard as he could pelt, to play at blindman's buff.

Scrooge took his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern; and having read all the newspapers, and beguiled the rest of the evening with his banker's book, went home to bed. He lived in chambers which had once belonged to his deceased partner. They were a gloomy suite of rooms, in a lowering pile of building up a yard. The building was old enough now, and dreary enough, for nobody lived in it but Scrooge, the other rooms being all let out as offices.

Now it is a fact that there was nothing at all particular about the knocker on the door, except that it was very large. It is also a fact that Scrooge had seen it, night and morning, during his whole residence in that place; also that

Scrooge had as little of what is called fancy about him as any man in the City of London, and yet Scrooge, having his key in the lock of the door, saw in the knocker, without its undergoing any intermediate process of change, — not a knocker, but Marley's face.

Marley's face with a dismal light about it, like a bad lobster in a dark cellar. It was not angry or ferocious, but looked at Scrooge as Marley used to look : with ghostly spectacles turned up on its ghostly forehead.

As Scrooge looked fixedly at this phenomenon; it was a knocker again. He said, "Pooh, pooh!" and closed it with a bang.

The sound resounded through the house like thunder. Every room above, and every cask in the wine-merchant's cellars below, appeared to have a separate peal of echoes of its own. Scrooge was not a man to be frightened by echoes. He fastened the door, and walked across the hall, and up the stairs, slowly, too, trimming his candle as he went.

Up Scrooge went, not caring a button for that. Darkness is cheap, and Scrooge liked it. But before he shut his heavy door, he walked through his rooms to see that all was right. He had just enough recollection of the face to desire to do that.

Sitting room, bedroom, lumber room. All as they should be. Nobody under the table, nobody

under the sofa ; a small fire in the grate ; spoon and basin ready ; and the little saucepan of gruel (Scrooge had a cold in his head) upon the hob. Nobody under the bed ; nobody in the closet ; nobody in his dressing-gown, which was hanging up in a suspicious attitude against the wall. Lumber room as usual. Old fire-guard, old shoes, two fish-baskets, washing-stand on three legs, and a poker.

Quite satisfied, he closed the door, and locked himself in ; double-locked himself in, which was not his custom. Thus secured against surprise, he took off his cravat ; put on his dressing-gown and slippers and his nightcap ; and sat down before the very low fire to take his gruel.

As he threw his head back in the chair, his glance happened to rest upon a bell, a disused bell, that hung in the room, and communicated, for some purpose now forgotten, with a chamber in the highest story of the building. It was with great astonishment, and with a strange, inexplicable dread, that, as he looked, he saw this bell begin to swing. Soon it rang out loudly, and so did every bell in the house.

This was succeeded by a clanking noise, deep down below ; as if some person were dragging a heavy chain over the casks in the wine-merchant's cellar.

Then he heard the noise, much louder, on the

floors below ; then coming up the stairs ; then coming straight towards his door.

It came on through the heavy door, and a specter passed into the room before his eyes. Upon its coming in, the dying flame leaped up, as though it cried, “I know him ! Marley’s Ghost !” and fell again.

The same face, the very same. Marley, in his pigtail, usual waistcoat, tights, and boots. His body was transparent ; so that Scrooge, observing him, and looking through his waistcoat, could see the two buttons on his coat behind.

Scrooge had often heard it said that Marley had no bowels,¹ but he had never believed it until now.

No, nor did he believe it even now. Though he looked the phantom through and through, and saw it standing before him ; though he felt the chilling influence of its death-cold eyes, and marked the very texture of the folded kerchief bound about its head and chin, he was still incredulous, and fought against his senses.

“How now !” said Scrooge, caustic and cold as ever. “What do you want with me ?”

“Much !”—Marley’s voice, no doubt about it.

“Who are you ?”

“Ask me who I *was*.”

¹ The words were formerly used in the sense of inner parts, and so (like *heart*, or *liver*) for pity, or compassion. The phrase meant, of course, that Marley was a man of no compassion, but here it is taken humorously in a literal sense.

"Who *were* you, then?" said Scrooge, raising his voice.

"In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley."

"Can you—can you sit down?" asked Scrooge, looking doubtfully at him.

"I can."

"Do it, then."

Scrooge asked the question, because he didn't know whether a ghost so transparent might find himself in a condition to take a chair; and felt that in the event of its being impossible, it might involve the necessity of an embarrassing explanation. But the Ghost sat down on the opposite side of the fireplace, as if he were quite used to it.

"You don't believe in me," observed the Ghost.

"I don't," said Scrooge.

"What evidence would you have of my reality beyond that of your senses?"

"I don't know," said Scrooge.

"Why do you doubt your senses?"

"Because," said Scrooge, "a little thing affects them. A slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheats. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!"

Scrooge was not much in the habit of cracking jokes, nor did he feel, in his heart, by any means waggish then. The truth is, that he tried to be

smart, as a means of distracting his own attention, and keeping down his horror.

But how much greater was his horror when, the phantom taking off the bandage round his head, as if it were too warm to wear in-doors, his lower jaw dropped down upon his breast !

“ Mercy ! Dreadful apparition, why do you trouble me ? Why do spirits walk the earth, and why do they come to me ? ”

“ It is required of every man, that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow-men, and travel far and wide ;¹ and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. I cannot tell you all I would. A very little more is permitted to me. I cannot rest, I cannot stay, I cannot linger anywhere. My spirit never walked beyond our counting-house, —mark me ! —in life my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole ; and weary journeys lie before me ! ”

“ Seven years dead,” mused Scrooge. “ And traveling all the time ? You travel fast ? ”

“ On the wings of the wind,” replied the Ghost.

“ You might have got over a great quantity of ground in seven years,” said Scrooge.

“ Oh ! blind-man ! ” cried the phantom, “ not to know that ages of incessant labor, by immortal creatures, for this earth, must pass into eternity

¹ i.e. that a man’s interests should not be confined to himself alone.

before the good of which it is susceptible is all developed! Not to know that any Christian spirit working kindly in its little sphere, whatever it may be, will find its mortal life too short for its vast means of usefulness! Not to know that no space of regret can make amends for one life's opportunities misused! Yet such was I! Oh! such was I!"

"But you were always a good man of business, Jacob," faltered Scrooge, who now began to apply this to himself.

"Business!" cried the Ghost, wringing his hands again. "Mankind was my business.¹ The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence were, all, my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!"

Scrooge was very much dismayed to hear the specter going on at this rate, and began to quake exceedingly.

"Hear me!" cried the Ghost. "My time is nearly gone."

"I will," said Scrooge. "But don't be hard upon me! Don't be flowery, Jacob! Pray!"

"I am here to-night to warn you, that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. A chance and hope of my procuring, Ebenezer."

¹ Though he had not appreciated it.

" You were always a good friend to me," said Scrooge. " Thankee ! "

" You will be haunted," resumed the Ghost, " by Three Spirits."

" Is that the chance and hope you mentioned, Jacob ? I — I think I'd rather not."

" Without their visits, you cannot hope to shun the path I tread. Expect the first to-morrow night, when the bell tolls One. Expect the second on the next night at the same hour. The third, upon the next night when the last stroke of Twelve has ceased to vibrate. Look to see me no more ; and look that, for your own sake, you remember what has passed between us ! "

It walked backward from him ; and at every step he took, the window raised itself a little, so that when the apparition reached it, it was wide open.

Scrooge closed the window, and examined the door by which the Ghost had entered. It was double-locked, as he had locked it with his own hands, and the bolts were undisturbed. Scrooge tried to say " Humbug ! " but stopped at the first syllable. And being, from the emotion he had undergone, or the fatigues of the day, or his glimpse of the Invisible World, or the dull conversation of the Ghost, or the lateness of the hour, much in need of repose, he went straight to bed, without undressing, and fell asleep on the instant.

STAVE TWO

THE FIRST OF THE THREE SPIRITS

WHEN Scrooge awoke it was so dark, that, looking out of bed, he could scarcely distinguish the transparent window from the opaque walls of his chamber, until suddenly the church clock tolled a deep, dull, hollow, melancholy ONE. Light flashed up in the room upon the instant, and the curtains¹ of his bed were drawn by a strange figure,—like a child ; yet not so like a child as like an old man, viewed through some supernatural medium, which gave him the appearance of having receded from the view, and being diminished to a child's proportions. Its hair, which hung about its neck and down its back, was white, as if with age ; and yet the face had not a wrinkle in it, and the tenderest bloom was on the skin. It held a branch of fresh, green holly in its hand ; and, in singular contradiction of that wintry emblem, had its dress trimmed with summer flowers. But the strangest thing about it was, that from the crown of its head there sprung a bright, clear jet of light, by which all this was visible ; and which was doubtless the occasion of its using, in its duller moments, a great extinguisher for a cap, which it now held under its arm.

¹ Cf. p. 81, note.

"Are you the Spirit, sir, whose coming was foretold to me?" asked Scrooge.

"I am!"

"Who, and what are you?" Scrooge demanded.

"I am the Ghost of Christmas Past."

"Long Past?" inquired Scrooge, observant of its dwarfish stature.

"No. Your past. The things that you will see with me are shadows of the things that have been, they will have no consciousness of us."

Scrooge then made bold to inquire what business brought him there.

"Your welfare!" said the Ghost. "Rise and walk with me!"

It would have been in vain for Scrooge to plead that the weather and the hour were not adapted to pedestrian purposes; that the bed was warm, and the thermometer a long way below freezing; that he was clad but lightly in his slippers, dressing-gown, and nightcap; and that he had a cold upon him at that time. The grasp, though gentle as a woman's hand, was not to be resisted. He rose; but finding that the Spirit made towards the window, clasped its robe in supplication.

"I am a mortal," Scrooge remonstrated, "and liable to fall."

"Bear but a touch of my hand *there*," said the Spirit, laying it upon his heart, "and you shall be upheld in more than this!"

As the words were spoken, they passed through

the wall, and stood upon an open country road, with fields on either hand. The city had entirely vanished. Not a vestige of it was to be seen. The darkness and the mist had vanished with it, for it was a clear, cold, winter day, with snow upon the ground.

“Good Heaven !” said Scrooge, clasping his hands together, as he looked about him. “I was bred in this place. I was a boy here !”

The Spirit gazed upon him mildly. Its gentle touch, though it had been light and instantaneous, appeared still present to the old man’s sense of feeling. He was conscious of a thousand odors floating in the air, each one connected with a thousand thoughts, and hopes, and joys, and cares long, long forgotten !

“Your lip is trembling,” said the Ghost. “And what is that upon your cheek ?”

Scrooge muttered, with an unusual catching in his voice, that it was a pimple, and begged the Ghost to lead him where he would.

“You recollect the way ?” inquired the Spirit. “Remember it !” cried Scrooge with fervor, “I could walk it blindfold.”

“Strange to have forgotten it for so many years !” observed the Ghost. “Let us go on.”

They walked along the road, Scrooge recognizing every gate, and post, and tree ; until a little market-town appeared in the distance, with its bridge, its church, and winding river. Some

shaggy ponies now were seen trotting towards them, with boys upon their backs, who called to other boys in country gigs and carts, driven by farmers. All these boys were in great spirits, and shouted to each other, until the broad fields were so full of merry music that the crisp air laughed to hear it.

"These are but shadows of the things that have been," said the Ghost. "They have no consciousness of us."

The jocund travelers came on; and as they came, Scrooge knew and named them every one. Why was he rejoiced beyond all bounds to see them? Why did his cold eye glisten, and his heart leap up as they went past? Why was he filled with gladness when he heard them give each other Merry Christmas, as they parted at cross-roads and by-ways, for their several homes? What was merry Christmas to Scrooge? Out upon merry Christmas! What good had it ever done to him?

"The school is not quite deserted," said the Ghost. "A solitary child, neglected by his friends, is left there still."

Scrooge said he knew it. And he sobbed.

They left the high-road, by a well-remembered lane, and soon approached a mansion of dull red brick, with a little weathercock-surmounted cupola, on the roof, and a bell hanging in it. It was a large house, but one of broken fortunes;

for the spacious offices were little used, their walls were damp and mossy, their windows broken, and their gates decayed. Fowls clucked and strutted in the stables, and the coach-houses and sheds were overrun with grass. Nor was it more retentive of its ancient state, within ; for entering the dreary hall, and glancing through the open doors of many rooms, they found them poorly furnished, cold, and vast. There was an earthy savor in the air, a chilly barrenness in the place, which associated itself somehow with too much getting up by candle-light, and not too much to eat.

They went, the Ghost and Scrooge, across the hall, to a door at the back of the house. It opened before them, and disclosed a long, bare, melancholy room, made barer still by lines of plain deal forms and desks. At one of these a lonely boy was reading near a feeble fire ; and Scrooge sat down upon a form, and wept to see his poor forgotten self as he had used to be.

Not a latent echo in the house, not a squeak and scuffle from the mice behind the paneling, not a drip from the half-thawed water-spout in the dull yard behind, not a sigh among the leafless boughs of one despondent poplar, not the idle swinging of an empty storehouse door, no, not a clicking in the fire, but fell upon the heart of Scrooge with softening influence, and gave a freer passage to his tears.

The Spirit touched him on the arm, and pointed

to his younger self, intent upon his reading. Suddenly a man, in foreign garments, wonderfully real and distinct to look at, stood outside the window, with an ax stuck in his belt, and leading by the bridle an ass laden with wood.

"Why, it's Ali Baba!" Scrooge exclaimed in ecstasy. "It's dear old honest Ali Baba! Yes, yes, I know! One Christmas-time, when yonder solitary child was left here all alone, he *did* come, for the first time, just like that. Poor boy! And Valentine," said Scrooge, "and his wild brother Orson; there they go! And what's his name, who was put down in his drawers, asleep, at the Gate of Damascus; don't you see him? And the Sultan's Groom turned upside down by the Genii; there he is upon his head! Serve him right! I'm glad of it. What business had *he* to be married to the Princess?"

To hear Scrooge expending all the earnestness of his nature on such subjects, in a most extraordinary voice between laughing and crying, and to see his heightened and excited face, would have been a surprise to his business friends in the City, indeed.

"There's the Parrot!" cried Scrooge. "Green body and yellow tail, with a thing like a lettuce growing out of the top of his head; there he is! Poor Robin Crusoe, he called him, when he came home again, after sailing round the island. 'Poor Robin Crusoe, where have you been, Robin

Crusoe ?' The man thought he was dreaming, but he wasn't. It was the Parrot, you know. There goes Friday, running for his life to the little creek ! Halloo ! Hoop ! Halloo !"

Then, with a rapidity of transition very foreign to his usual character, he said, in pity for his former self, " Poor boy !" and cried again.

" I wish," Scrooge muttered, putting his hand in his pocket, and looking about him, after drying his eyes with his cuff ; " but it's too late now."

" What is the matter ?" asked the Spirit.

" Nothing," said Scrooge, " nothing. There was a boy singing a Christmas Carol at my door last night. I should like to have given him something : that's all."

The Ghost smiled thoughtfully, and waved its hand, saying, at it did so, " Let us see another Christmas !"

Scrooge's former self grew larger at the words, and the room became a little darker and more dirty. The panels shrunk, the windows cracked ; fragments of plaster fell out of the ceiling, and the naked laths were shown instead ; but how all this was brought about, Scrooge knew no more than you do. He only knew that it was quite correct ; that everything had happened so ; that there he was, alone again, when all the other boys had gone home for the jolly holidays.

Although they had but that moment left the school behind them, they were now in the busy

thoroughfares of a city. It was made plain enough, by the dressing of the shops, that here, too, it was Christmas-time.

The Ghost stopped at a certain warehouse door, and asked Scrooge if he knew it.

"Know it!" said Scrooge. "Was I apprenticed here!"

They went in. At sight of an old gentleman in a Welsh wig, sitting behind such a high desk that if he had been two inches taller he must have knocked his head against the ceiling, Scrooge cried in great excitement:—

"Why, it's old Fezziwig! Bless his heart; it's Fezziwig alive again!"

Old Fezziwig laid down his pen, and looked up at the clock, which pointed to the hour of seven. He rubbed his hands; adjusted his capacious waist-coat; laughed all over himself, from his shoes to his organ of benevolence; and called out, in a comfortable, oily, rich, fat, jovial voice:—

"Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! Dick!"

A living and moving picture of Scrooge's former self, a young man, came briskly in, accompanied by his fellow-'prentice.

"Dick Wilkins, to be sure!" said Scrooge to the Ghost. "My old old fellow-'prentice. Bless me, yes. There he is. He was very much attached to me, was Dick. Poor Dick! Dear, dear!"

"Yo ho, my boys!" said Fezziwig. "No more work to-night. Christmas Eve, Dick. Christ-

mas, Ebenezer ! Let's have the shutters up, before a man can say Jack Robinson. Clear away, my lads, and let's have lots of room here ! Hillihoo, Dick ! Chirrup, Ebenezer ! ”

Clear away ! There was nothing they wouldn't have cleared away, or couldn't have cleared away, with old Fezziwig looking on. It was done in a minute. Every movable was packed off, as if it were dismissed from public life forevermore ; the floor was swept and watered, the lamps were trimmed, fuel was heaped upon the fire ; and the warehouse was as snug, and warm, and dry, and bright a ballroom as you would desire to see upon a winter's night.

In came a fiddler with a music book, and went up to the lofty desk, and made an orchestra of it, and tuned like fifty stomach-aches. In came Mrs. Fezziwig, one vast, substantial smile. In came the three Miss Fezziwigs, beaming and lovable. In came the six young followers whose hearts they broke. In came all the young men and women employed in the business. In came the house-maid, with her cousin, the baker. In came the cook, with her brother's particular friend, the milkman. In they all came, one after another ; some shyly, some boldly, some gracefully, some awkwardly, some pushing, some pulling ; in they all came, anyhow and everyhow. Away they all went, twenty couple at once ; hands half round and back again the other way ; down the middle

and up again ; round and round in various stages of affectionate grouping ; old top couple always turning up in the wrong place ; new top couple starting off again, as soon as they got there ; all top couples at last, and not a bottom one to help them ! When this result was brought about, old Fezziwig, clapping his hands to stop the dance, cried out, " Well done ! " and the fiddler plunged his hot face into a pot of porter, especially provided for that purpose.

There were more dances, and there were forfeits, and more dances, and there was cake, and there was negus, and there was a great piece of cold roast, and there was a great piece of cold boiled, and there were mince pies, and plenty of beer. But the great effect of the evening came after the roast and boiled, when the fiddler struck up "Sir Roger de Coverley."¹ Then old Fezziwig stood out to dance with Mrs. Fezziwig. Top couple, too ; with a good stiff piece of work cut out for them ; three or four and twenty pair of partners ; people who were not to be trifled with ; people who *would* dance, and had no notion of walking. But if they had been twice as many — ah, four times — old Fezziwig would have been a match for them, and so would Mrs. Fezziwig. As to *her*, she was worthy to be his partner in every sense of the term. A positive light appeared to

¹The typical English country dance, of the same general kind as the Virginia reel.

issue from Fezziwig's calves. They shone in every part of the dance like moons. You couldn't have predicted, at any given time, what would become of them next. And when old Fezziwig and Mrs. Fezziwig had gone all through the dance ; advance and retire, turn your partner, bow and courtesy, corkscrew, thread-the-needle, and back again to your place ; Fezziwig "cut "¹— so deftly, that he appeared to wink with his legs, and came upon his feet again without a stagger.

When the clock struck eleven, this domestic ball broke up. Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig took their stations, one on either side the door, and shaking hands with every person individually as he or she went out, wished him or her a Merry Christmas. When everybody had retired but the two 'prentices, they did the same to them ; and thus the cheerful voices died away, and the lads were lefft to their beds, which were under a counter in the back shop.

"A small matter," said the Ghost, "to make these silly folks so full of gratitude. He has spent but a few pounds of your mortal money : three or four, perhaps. Is that so much that he deserves this praise ?"

"It isn't that," said Scrooge, heated by the remark, and speaking unconsciously like his former, not his latter self,— "it isn't that, Spirit. He

¹ Cut pigeon-wings; i.e. leaped in the air and clapped his heels together.

has the power to render us happy or unhappy ; to make our service light or burdensome ; a pleasure or a toil. Say that his power lies in words and looks ; in things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to add and count 'em up ; what then ? The happiness he gives is quite as great as if it cost a fortune."

He felt the Spirit's glance, and stopped.

" What is the matter ? " asked the Ghost.

" Nothing particular," said Scrooge.

" Something, I think ? " the Ghost insisted.

" No," said Scrooge, — " no. I should like to be able to say a word or two to my clerk just now. That's all."

" My time grows short," observed the Spirit.
" Quick ! "

This was not addressed to Scrooge, or to any one whom he could see, but it produced an immediate effect. For again Scrooge saw himself. He was older now ; a man in the prime of life.

He was not alone, but sat by the side of a fair young girl in a black dress, in whose eyes there were tears.

" It matters little," she said softly. " To you, very little. Another idol has displaced me ; and if it can cheer and comfort you in time to come, as I would have tried to do, I have no just cause to grieve."

" What idol has displaced you ? "

" A golden one. You fear the world too much,"

she answered gently. "All your other hopes have merged into the hope of being beyond the chance of its sordid reproach. I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until the master passion, Gain, engrosses you. Have I not?"

"What then?" he retorted. "Even if I have grown so much wiser, what then? I am not changed towards you. Have I ever sought release from our engagement?"

"In words, no. Never."

"In what, then?"

"In a changed nature; in an altered spirit; in another atmosphere of life; another Hope as its great end. If you were free to-day, to-morrow, yesterday, can even I believe that you would choose a dowerless girl,—or, choosing her, if for a moment you were false enough to your one guiding principle to do so, do I not know that your repentance and regret would surely follow? I do; and I release you. With a full heart, for the love of him you once were."

"Spirit! remove me from this place."

"I told you these were shadows of the things that have been," said the Ghost. "That they are what they are, do not blame me!"

"Remove me!" Scrooge exclaimed. "I cannot bear it! Leave me! Take me back! Haunt me no longer!"

As he struggled with the Spirit, he was conscious of being exhausted, and overcome by an

irresistible drowsiness ; and, further, of being in his own bedroom. He had barely time to reel to bed before he sank into a heavy sleep.

STAVE THREE

THE SECOND OF THE THREE SPIRITS

SCROOGE awoke in his own bedroom. There was no doubt about that. But it and his own adjoining sitting room, into which he shuffled in his slippers, attracted by a great light there, had undergone a surprising transformation. The walls and ceiling were so hung with living green that it looked a perfect grove. The leaves of holly, mistletoe, and ivy reflected back the light, as if so many little mirrors had been scattered there ; and such a mighty blaze went roaring up the chimney, as that petrifaction of a hearth had never known in Scrooge's time, or Marley's, or for many and many a winter season gone. Heaped upon the floor, to form a kind of throne, were turkeys, geese, game, brawn, great joints of meat, sucking pigs, long wreaths of sausages, mince pies, plum puddings, barrels of oysters, red-hot chestnuts, cherry-cheeked apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears, immense twelfth-cakes, and great bowls of punch. In easy state upon this couch, there sat a Giant,¹ glorious to

¹ This is a description of Santa Claus, the Dutch name of Saint Nicholas, the patron saint of children. The custom, in

see ; who bore a glowing torch in shape not unlike Plenty's horn, and who raised it high to shed its light on Scrooge, as he came peeping round the door.

"Come in !" exclaimed the Ghost, — "come in ! and know me better, man ! I am the Ghost of Christmas Present. Look upon me ! You have never seen the like of me before ? "

"Never," Scrooge made answer to it.

"Have never walked forth with the younger members of my family ; meaning (for I am very young) my elder brothers born in these later years ?" pursued the Phantom.

"I don't think I have," said Scrooge. "I am afraid I have not. Have you had many brothers, Spirit ?"

"More than eighteen hundred," said the Ghost.

"A tremendous family to provide for," muttered Scrooge. "Spirit," said Scrooge, submissively, "conduct me where you will. I went forth last night on compulsion, and I learnt a lesson which is working now. To-night, if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it."

"Touch my robe ! "

Scrooge did as he was told, and held it fast.

Holly, mistletoe, red berries, ivy, turkeys, geese, some European countries and in America, of children hanging up their stockings for Santa Claus to fill with presents is derived from a story that this saint threw into an open window, on three different nights, a purse of gold as a marriage portion for each of the three daughters of a poor nobleman.

game, poultry, brawn, meat, pigs, sausages, oysters, pies, puddings, fruit, and punch, all vanished instantly. So did the room, the fire, the ruddy glow, the hour of night; and they stood in the city streets on Christmas morning, where (for the weather was severe) the people made a rough, but brisk and not unpleasant kind of music, in scraping the snow from the pavement in front of their dwellings, and from the tops of their houses, whence it was mad delight to the boys to see it come plumping down into the road below, and splitting into artificial little snow-storms.

The house fronts looked black enough, and the windows blacker, contrasting with the smooth white sheet of snow upon the roofs, and with the dirtier snow upon the ground; which last deposit had been plowed up in deep furrows by the heavy wheels of carts and wagons; furrows that crossed and recrossed each other hundreds of times where the great streets branched off; and made intricate channels, hard to trace, in the thick yellow mud and icy water. The sky was gloomy, and the shortest streets were choked up with a dingy mist, half thawed, half frozen, whose heavier particles descended in a shower of sooty atoms, as if all the chimneys in Great Britain had, by one consent, caught fire, and were blazing away to their dear hearts' content. There was nothing very cheerful in the climate or the town, and yet was there an air of cheerfulness abroad that the

clearest summer air and brightest summer sun might have endeavored to diffuse in vain.

For the people who were shoveling away on the house-tops were jovial and full of glee, calling out to one another from the parapets, and now and then exchanging a facetious snowball,—better-natured missile far than many a wordy jest,—laughing heartily if it went right, and not less heartily if it went wrong. The poulterers' shops were still half open, and the fruiterers' were radiant in their glory. There were great, round, pot-bellied baskets of chestnuts, shaped like the waist-coats of jolly old gentlemen, lolling at the doors, and tumbling out into the street in their apoplectic opulence. There were ruddy, brown-faced, broad-girthed Spanish onions, shining in the fatness of their growth like Spanish friars, and winking from their shelves in wanton slyness at the girls as they went by, and glanced demurely at the hung-up mistletoe. There were pears and apples, clustered high in blooming pyramids ; there were bunches of grapes, made, in the shopkeepers' benevolence, to dangle from conspicuous hooks, that people's mouths might water gratis as they passed ; there were piles of filberts, mossy and brown, recalling, in their fragrance, ancient walks among the woods, and pleasant shufflings ankle deep through withered leaves ; there were Norfolk biffins, squab and swarthy, setting off the yellow of the oranges and lemons, and, in the great compactness of their juicy

persons, urgently entreating and beseeching to be carried home in paper bags and eaten after dinner. The very gold and silver fish, set forth among these choice fruits in a bowl, though members of a dull and stagnant-blooded race, appeared to know that there was something going on ; and, to a fish, went gasping round and round their little world in slow and passionless excitement.

The grocers' ! oh, the grocers' ! nearly closed, with perhaps two shutters down, or one ; but through those gaps such glimpses ! It was not alone that the scales descending on the counter made a merry sound, or that the twine and roller parted company so briskly, or that the canisters were rattled up and down like juggling tricks, or even that the blended scents of tea and coffee were so grateful to the nose, or even that the raisins were so plentiful and rare, the almonds so extremely white, the sticks of cinnamon so long and straight, the other spices so delicious, the candied fruits so caked and spotted with molten sugar as to make the coldest lookers-on feel faint, and subsequently bilious. Nor was it that the figs were moist and pulpy, or that the French plums blushed in modest tartness from their highly decorated boxes, or that everything was good to eat and in its Christmas dress ; but the customers were all so hurried and so eager in the hopeful promise of the day, that they tumbled up against each other at the door, crashing their wicker bas-

kets wildly, and left their purchases upon the counter, and came running back to fetch them, and committed hundreds of the like mistakes, in the best humor possible ; while the grocer and his people were so frank and fresh that the polished hearts with which they fastened their aprons behind might have been their own, worn outside for general inspection, and for Christmas daws to peck at, if they chose.

But soon the steeples called good people all to church and chapel, and away they came, flocking through the streets in their best clothes, and with their gayest faces. And at the same time there emerged from scores of by-streets, lanes, and nameless turnings innumerable people, carrying their dinners to the bakers' shops. The sight of these poor revelers appeared to interest the Spirit very much, for he stood, with Scrooge beside him, in a baker's doorway, and, taking off the covers as their bearers passed, sprinkled incense on their dinners from his torch. And it was a very uncommon kind of torch, for once or twice when there were angry words between some dinner-carriers who had jostled each other, he shed a few drops of water on them from it, and their good-humor was restored directly. For they said, it was a shame to quarrel upon Christmas Day. And so it was ! God love it, so it was !

Scrooge and the Ghost passed on, invisible, straight to Scrooge's clerk's ; and on the threshold

of the door the Spirit smiled, and stopped to bless Bob Cratchit's dwelling with the sprinklings of his torch. Think of that ! Bob had but fifteen "Bob" ¹ a week himself ; he pocketed on Saturdays but fifteen copies of his Christian name ; and yet the Ghost of Christmas Present blessed his four-roomed house !

Then up rose Mrs. Cratchit, Cratchit's wife, dressed out but poorly in a twice-turned gown, but brave in ribbons, which are cheap and make a goodly show for sixpence ; and she laid the cloth, assisted by Belinda Cratchit, second of her daughters, also brave in ribbons.; while Master Peter Cratchit plunged a fork into the saucepan of potatoes, and getting the corners of his monstrous shirt-collar (Bob's private property, conferred upon his son and heir in honor of the day) into his mouth, rejoiced to find himself so gallantly attired, and yearned to show his linen in the fashionable Parks. And now two smaller Cratchits, boy and girl, came tearing in, screaming that outside the baker's they had smelt the goose, and known it for their own ; and, basking in luxurious thoughts of sage and onion, these young Cratchits danced about the table, and exalted Master Peter Cratchit to the skies, while he (not proud, although his collars nearly choked him) blew the fire, until the slow potatoes, bubbling up, knocked loudly at the saucepan-lid to be let out and peeled.

¹ A shilling.

"What has ever got your precious father, then?" said Mrs. Cratchit. "And your brother, Tiny Tim? And Martha warn't as late last Christmas Day by half an hour!"

"Here's Martha, mother," said a girl, appearing as she spoke.

"Here's Martha, mother!" cried the two young Cratchits. "Hurrah! There's *such* a goose, Martha!"

"Why, bless your heart alive, my dear, how late you are!" said Mrs. Cratchit, kissing her a dozen times, and taking off her shawl and bonnet for her with officious zeal.

"We'd a deal of work to finish up last night," replied the girl, "and had to clear away this morning, mother!"

"Well! Never mind so long as you are come," said Mrs. Cratchit. "Sit ye down before the fire, my dear, and have a warm, Lord bless ye!"

"No, no! There's father coming," cried the two young Cratchits, who were everywhere at once. "Hide, Martha, hide!"

So Martha hid herself, and in came little Bob, the father, with at least three feet of comforter, exclusive of the fringe, hanging down before him; and his threadbare clothes darned up and brushed, to look seasonable; and Tiny Tim upon his shoulder. Alas for Tiny Tim, he bore a little crutch, and had his limbs supported by an iron frame!

"Why, where's our Martha!" cried Bob Cratchit, looking round.

"Not coming," said Mrs. Cratchit.

"Not coming!" said Bob, with a sudden declension in his high spirits; for he had been Tim's blood horse all the way from church, and had come home rampant,—"not coming upon Christmas Day!"

Martha didn't like to see him disappointed, if it were only in joke; so she came out prematurely from behind the closet door, and ran into his arms, while the two young Cratchits hustled Tiny Tim, and bore him off into the washhouse, that he might hear the pudding singing in the copper.

"And how did little Tim behave?" asked Mrs. Cratchit, when she had rallied Bob on his credulity and Bob had hugged his daughter to his heart's content.

"As good as gold," said Bob, "and better. Somehow he gets thoughtful, sitting by himself so much, and thinks the strangest things you ever heard. He told me, coming home, that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember, upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk and blind-men see."

Bob's voice was tremulous when he told them this, and trembled more when he said that Tiny Tim was growing strong and hearty.

His active little crutch was heard upon the floor,

and back came Tiny Tim before another word was spoken, escorted by his brother and sister to his stool beside the fire ; and while Bob, turning up his cuffs, —as if, poor fellow, they were capable of being made more shabby,— compounded some hot mixture in a jug with gin and lemons, and stirred it round and round, and put it on the hob to simmer, Master Peter and the two ubiquitous young Cratchits went to fetch the goose, with which they soon returned in high procession.

Mrs. Cratchit made the gravy (ready beforehand in a little saucepan) hissing hot ; Master Peter mashed the potatoes with incredible vigor ; Miss Belinda sweetened up the apple sauce ; Martha dusted the hot plates ; Bob took Tiny Tim beside him in a tiny corner at the table ; the two young Cratchits set chairs for everybody, not forgetting themselves, and, mounting guard upon their posts, crammed spoons into their mouths, lest they should shriek for goose before their turn came to be helped. At last the dishes were set on, and grace was said. It was succeeded by a breathless pause, as Mrs. Cratchit, looking slowly all along the carving-knife, prepared to plunge it in the breast ; but when she did, and when the long-expected gush of stuffing issued forth, one murmur of delight arose all round the board, and even Tiny Tim, excited by the two young Cratchits, beat on the table with the handle of his knife, and feebly cried Hurrah !

There never was such a goose. Bob said he didn't believe there ever was such a goose cooked. Its tenderness and flavor, size and cheapness, were the themes of universal admiration. Eked out by apple sauce and mashed potatoes, it was a sufficient dinner for the whole family ; indeed, as Mrs. Cratchit said with great delight (surveying one small atom of a bone upon the dish), they hadn't ate it all at last ! Yet every one had had enough, and the youngest Cratchits in particular were steeped in sage and onion to the eyebrows ! But now, the plates being changed by Miss Belinda, Mrs. Cratchit left the room alone— too nervous to bear witnesses — to take the pudding up, and bring it in.

Suppose it should not be done enough ! Suppose it should break in turning out ! Suppose somebody should have got over the wall of the back yard, and stolen it, while they were merry with the goose,— a supposition at which the two young Cratchits became livid ! All sorts of horrors were supposed.

Hallo ! A great deal of steam ! The pudding was out of the copper. A smell like a washing-day ! That was the cloth. A smell like an eating-house and a pastry-cook's next door to each other, with a laundress's next door to that ! That was the pudding ! In half a minute Mrs. Cratchit entered — flushed, but smiling proudly — with the pudding, like a speckled cannon-ball, so

hard and firm, blazing in half of half-a-quartern of ignited brandy, and bedight with Christmas holly stuck into the top.

Oh, a wonderful pudding ! Bob Cratchit said, and calmly, too, that he regarded it as the greatest success achieved by Mrs. Cratchit since their marriage. Mrs. Cratchit said that, now the weight was off her mind, she would confess she had her doubts about the quantity of flour. Everybody had something to say about it, but nobody said or thought it was at all a small pudding for a large family. It would have been flat heresy to do so. Any Cratchit would have blushed to hint at such a thing.

At last the dinner was all done, the cloth was cleared, the hearth swept, and the fire made up. The compound in the jug being tasted, and considered perfect, apples and oranges were put upon the table, and a shovelful of chestnuts on the fire. Then all the Cratchit family drew round the hearth in what Bob Cratchit called a circle, and at Bob Cratchit's elbow stood the family display of glass,—two tumblers, and a custard-cup without a handle.

These held the hot stuff from the jug, however, as well as golden goblets would have done ; and Bob served it out with beaming looks, while the chestnuts on the fire sputtered and cracked noisily. Then Bob proposed : —

“ A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us ! ”

Which all the family reëchoed.

"God bless us every one!" said Tiny Tim, the last of all.

He sat very close to his father's side, upon his little stool. Bob held his withered little hand in his, as if he loved the child, and wished to keep him by his side, and dreaded that he might be taken from him.

Scrooge raised his head speedily, on hearing his own name.

"Mr. Scrooge!" said Bob; "I'll give you Mr. Scrooge, the Founder of the Feast!"

"The Founder of the Feast, indeed!" cried Mrs. Cratchit, reddening. "I wish I had him here. I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast upon, and I hope he'd have a good appetite for it."

"My dear," said Bob, "the children! Christmas Day."

"It should be Christmas Day, I am sure," said she, "on which one drinks the health of such an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man as Mr. Scrooge. You know he is, Robert! Nobody knows it better than you do, poor fellow!"

"My dear," was Bob's mild answer, "Christmas Day."

"I'll drink his health for your sake, and the Day's," said Mrs. Cratchit, "not for his. Long life to him! A merry Christmas and a happy new year! He'll be very merry and very happy, I have no doubt!"

The children drank the toast after her. It was the first of their proceedings which had no heartiness in it. Tiny Tim drank it last of all, but he didn't care twopence for it. Scrooge was the Ogre of the family. The mention of his name cast a dark shadow on the party, which was not dispelled for full five minutes.

After it had passed away, they were ten times merrier than before, from the mere relief of Scrooge the Baleful being done with. Bob Cratchit told them how he had a situation in his eye for Master Peter, which would bring in, if obtained, full five-and-sixpence weekly. The two young Cratchits laughed tremendously at the idea of Peter's being a man of business ; and Peter himself looked thoughtfully at the fire from between his collars, as if he were deliberating what particular investments he should favor when he came into the receipt of that bewildering income. Martha, who was a poor apprentice at a milliner's, then told them what kind of work she had to do, and how many hours she worked at a stretch, and how she meant to lie abed to-morrow morning for a good, long rest ; to-morrow being a holiday she passed at home. Also how she had seen a countess and a lord some days before, and how the lord "was much about as tall as Peter ;" at which Peter pulled up his collars so high that you couldn't have seen his head if you had been there. All this time the chestnuts and the jug

went round and round ; and by and by they had a song, about a lost child traveling in the snow, from Tiny Tim, who had a plaintive little voice, and sang it very well indeed.

There was nothing of high mark in this. They were not a handsome family ; they were not well dressed ; their shoes were far from being water-proof ; their clothes were scanty ; and Peter might have known, and very likely did, the inside of a pawnbroker's. But they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time ; and when they faded, and looked happier yet in the bright sprinklings of the Spirit's torch at parting, Scrooge had his eye upon them, and especially on Tiny Tim, until the last.

It was a great surprise to Scrooge, as this scene vanished, to hear a hearty laugh. It was a much greater surprise to Scrooge to recognize it as his own nephew's, and to find himself in a bright, dry, gleaming room, with the Spirit standing smiling by his side, and looking at that same nephew !

It is a fair, even-handed, noble adjustment of things, that, while there is infection in disease and sorrow, there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good-humor. When Scrooge's nephew laughed, Scrooge's niece by marriage, laughed as heartily as he. And their assembled friends, being not a bit behindhand, laughed out lustily.

"He said that Christmas was a humbug, as I live!" cried Scrooge's nephew. "He believed it, too!"

"More shame for him, Fred!" said Scrooge's niece, indignantly. Bless those women! they never do anything by halves. They are always in earnest.

She was very pretty; exceedingly pretty. With a dimpled, surprised-looking, capital face; a ripe little mouth, that seemed made to be kissed,—as no doubt it was; all kinds of good little dots about her chin, that melted into one another when she laughed; and the sunniest pair of eyes you ever saw in any little creature's head. Altogether she was what you would have called provoking, but satisfactory, too. Oh, perfectly satisfactory!

"He's a comical old fellow," said Scrooge's nephew, "that's the truth; and not so pleasant as he might be. However, his offenses carry their own punishment, and I have nothing to say against him. Who suffers by his ill whims? Himself, always. Here, he takes it into his head to dislike us, and he won't come and dine with us. What's the consequence? He don't lose much of a dinner."

"Indeed, I think he loses a very good dinner," interrupted Scrooge's niece. Everybody else said the same, and they must be allowed to have been competent judges, because they had just had din-

ner ; and, with the dessert upon the table, were clustered round the fire, by lamplight.

“ Well ! I am very glad to hear it,” said Scrooge’s nephew, “ because I haven’t any great faith in these young housekeepers. What do *you* say, Topper ? ”

Topper had clearly got his eye upon one of Scrooge’s niece’s sisters, for he answered that a bachelor was a wretched outcast, who had no right to express an opinion on the subject. Whereat Scrooge’s niece’s sister—the plump one with the lace tucker, not the one with the roses—blushed.

“ Do go on, Fred,” said Scrooge’s niece, clapping her hands. “ He never finishes what he begins to say ! He is such a ridiculous fellow ! ”

Scrooge’s nephew reveled in another laugh, and as it was impossible to keep the infection off, though the plump sister tried hard to do it with aromatic vinegar, his example was unanimously followed.

“ I was . only going to say,” said Scrooge’s nephew, “ that the consequence of his taking a dislike to us, and not making merry with us, is, as I think, that he loses some pleasant moments, which could do him no harm. I am sure he loses pleasanter companions than he can find in his own thoughts, either in his moldy old office or his dusty chambers. I mean to give him the same chance every year, whether he likes it or not, for

I pity him. He may rail at Christmas till he dies, but he can't help thinking better of it—I defy him—if he finds me going there, in good temper, year after year, and saying, ‘Uncle Scrooge, how are you?’ If it only puts him in the vein to leave his poor clerk fifty pounds, *that's something*; and I think I shook him, yesterday.”

It was their turn to laugh now, at the notion of his shaking Scrooge. But being thoroughly good-natured, and not much caring what they laughed at, so that they laughed at any rate, he encouraged them in their merriment, and passed the bottle, joyously.

After tea they had some music. For they were a musical family, and knew what they were about, when they sung a glee or catch, I can assure you; especially Topper, who could growl away in the bass like a good one, and never swell the large veins in his forehead, or get red in the face over it.

But they didn't devote the whole evening to music. After a while they played at forfeits; for it is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty Founder was a child himself. There was first a game at blind-man's buff. And I no more believe Topper was really blind than I believe he had eyes in his boots. Because the way he went after that plump sister in the lace tucker was an outrage on the credulity of human nature. Knocking down the

fire-irons, tumbling over the chairs, bumping up against the piano, smothering himself amongst the curtains, wherever she went, there went he ! He always knew where the plump sister was. He wouldn't catch anybody else. If you had fallen up against him (as some of them did) and stood there, he would have made a feint of endeavoring to seize you, which would have been an affront to your understanding, and would instantly have sidled off in the direction of the plump sister.

"Here is a new game," said Scrooge. "One half hour, Spirit, only one ! "

It was a game called Yes and No,¹ where Scrooge's nephew had to think of something, and the rest must find out what ; he only answering to their questions yes or no, as the case was. The fire of questioning to which he was exposed, elicited from him that he was thinking of an animal, a live animal, rather a disagreeable animal, a savage animal, an animal that growled and grunted sometimes, and talked sometimes, and lived in London, and walked about the streets, and wasn't made a show of, and wasn't led by anybody, and didn't live in a menagerie, and was never killed in a market, and was not a horse, or an ass, or a cow, or a bull, or a tiger, or a dog, or a pig, or a cat, or a bear. At every new question put to him, this nephew burst into a fresh roar of laughter ; and was so inexpressibly tickled, that he was obliged to get

¹ Often called "Twenty Questions."

up off the sofa and stamp. At last the plump sister cried out :—

“I have found it out ! I know what it is, Fred !
I know what it is !”

“What is it ?” cried Fred.

“It’s your Uncle Scro-o-o-o-oge !”

Which it certainly was. Admiration was the universal sentiment, though some objected that the reply to “Is it a bear ?” ought to have been “Yes.”

Uncle Scrooge had imperceptibly become so gay and light of heart, that he would have drank to the unconscious company in an inaudible speech, if the Ghost had given him time. But the whole scene passed off in the breath of the last word spoken by his nephew ; and he and the Spirit were again upon their travels.

Much they saw, and far they went, and many homes they visited, but always with a happy end. The Spirit stood beside sick-beds, and they were cheerful ; on foreign lands, and they were close at home ; by struggling men, and they were patient in their greater hope ; by poverty, and it was rich. In almshouse, hospital, and jail, in misery’s every refuge, where vain man in his little brief authority had not made fast the door, and barred the Spirit out, he left his blessing, and taught Scrooge his precepts.

Suddenly, as they stood together in an open place, the bell struck twelve.

Scrooge looked about him for the Ghost, and saw it no more. As the last stroke ceased to vibrate, he remembered the prediction of old Jacob Marley, and, lifting up his eyes, beheld a solemn Phantom, draped and hooded, coming, like a mist along the ground, towards him.

STAVE FOUR

THE LAST OF THE SPIRITS

THE Phantom slowly, gravely, silently, approached. When it came near him, Scrooge bent down upon his knee ; for in the air through which this Spirit moved it seemed to scatter gloom and mystery.

It was shrouded in a deep black garment, which concealed its head, its face, its form, and left nothing of it visible save one outstretched hand.

He knew no more, for the Spirit neither spoke nor moved.

"I am in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come ?" said Scrooge.

"Ghost of the Future ! I fear you more than any specter I have seen. But as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart. Will you not speak to me ?"

It gave him no reply. The hand was pointed straight before them.

"Lead on! Lead on! The night is waning fast, and it is precious time to me, I know. Lead on, Spirit!"

They scarcely seemed to enter the City¹; for the City rather seemed to spring up about them. But there they were, in the heart of it; on 'Change, amongst the merchants.

The Spirit stopped beside one little knot of business men. Observing that the hand was pointed to them, Scrooge advanced to listen to their talk.

"No," said a great fat man with a monstrous chin. "I don't know much about it either way. I only know he's dead."

"When did he die?" inquired another.

"Last night, I believe."

"Why, what was the matter with him? I thought he'd never die."

"God knows," said the first, with a yawn.

"What has he done with his money?" asked a red-faced gentleman.

"I haven't heard," said the man with the large chin, yawning again. "Left it to his company, perhaps. He hasn't left it to me. That's all I know."

This pleasantry was received with a general laugh.

¹ The City is the old part of London.

"It's likely to be a very cheap funeral," said the same speaker; "for, upon my life, I don't know of anybody to go to it. Suppose we make up a party, and volunteer?"

"I don't mind going if a lunch is provided," observed the gentleman with the excrescence on his nose. "But I must be fed, if I make one."

Another laugh.

"Well, I am the most disinterested among you, after all," said the first speaker, "for I never wear black gloves, and I never eat lunch. But I'll offer to go, if anybody else will. When I come to think of it, I'm not at all sure that I wasn't his most particular friend; for we used to stop and speak whenever we met. By-by!"

Speakers and listeners strolled away, and mixed with other groups. Scrooge knew the men, and looked towards the Spirit for an explanation.

The Phantom glided on into a street. Its finger pointed to two persons meeting. Scrooge listened again, thinking that the explanation might lie here.

He knew these men, also, perfectly. They were men of business: very wealthy, and of great importance. He had made a point always of standing well in their esteem: in a business point of view, that is; strictly in a business point of view.

"How are you?" said one.

"How are you?" returned the other.

"Well!" said the first. "Old Scratch has got his own at last, hey?"

"So I am told," returned the second. "Cold, isn't it?"

"Seasonable for Christmas time. You're not a skater, I suppose?"

"No. No. Something else to think of. Good-morning!"

Not another word. That was their meeting, their conversation, and their parting.

Scrooge was at first inclined to be surprised that the Spirit should attach importance to conversations apparently so trivial; but feeling assured that it must have some hidden purpose, he set himself to consider what it was likely to be. It could scarcely be supposed to have any bearing on the death of Jacob, his old partner, for that was Past, and this Ghost's province was the Future.

He looked about in that very place for his own image; but another man stood in his accustomed corner, and though the clock pointed to his usual time of day for being there, he saw no likeness of himself among the multitudes that poured in through the Porch. It gave him little surprise, however, for he had been revolving in his mind a change of life, and he thought and hoped he saw his new-born resolutions carried out in this.

They left this busy scene, and went into an obscure part of the town, to a low shop where iron, old rags, bottles, bones, and greasy offal were brought.

A gray-haired rascal, of great age, sat smoking his pipe.

Scrooge and the Phantom came into the presence of this man, just as a woman with a heavy bundle slunk into the shop. But she had scarcely entered, when another woman, similarly laden, came in too; and she was closely followed by a man in faded black. After a short period of blank astonishment, in which the old man with the pipe had joined them, they all three burst into a laugh.

"Let the charwoman alone to be the first!" cried she who had entered first. "Let the laundress alone to be the second; and let the undertaker's man alone to be the third. Look here, old Joe, here's a chance! If we haven't all three met here without meaning it!"

"You couldn't have met in a better place. You were made free of it long ago, you know; and the other two ain't strangers. What have you got to sell? What have you got to sell?"

"Half a minute's patience, Joe, and you shall see."

"What odds, then! What odds, Mrs. Dilber?" said the woman. "Every person has a right to take care of themselves. *He* always did! Who's the worse for the loss of a few things like these? Not a dead man I suppose."

Mrs. Dilber, whose manner was remarkable for general propitiation, said:—

"No, indeed, ma'am; if he wanted to keep 'em after he was dead, a wicked old screw, why wasn't he natural in his lifetime? If he had been, he'd have had somebody to look after him when he was struck with Death, instead of lying gasping out his last there, alone by himself."

"It's the truest word that ever was spoke," said Mrs. Dilber. "It's a judgment on him."

"I wish it was a little heavier judgment," replied the woman; "and it should have been, you may depend upon it, if I could have laid my hands on anything else. Open that bundle, old Joe, and let me know the value of it. Speak out plain. I'm not afraid to be the first, nor afraid for them to see it."

Joe went down on his knees for the greater convenience of opening the bundle, and dragged out a large, heavy roll of some dark stuff.

"What do you call this?" said Joe. "Bed curtains!"

"Ah! Bed curtains! Don't drop that oil upon the blankets, now."

"*His* blankets?" asked Joe.

"Whose else's do you think?" replied the woman. "He isn't likely to take cold without 'em, I dare say. Ah! You may look through that shirt till your eyes ache; but you won't find a hole in it, nor a threadbare place. It's the best lie had, and a fine one, too. They'd have wasted it by dressing him up in it, if it hadn't been for me."

Scrooge listened to this dialogue in horror.

"Spirit!" said Scrooge, shuddering from head to foot. "I see, I see. The case of this unhappy man might be my own. My life tends that way now. Merciful Heaven, what is this?"

The scene had changed, and now he almost touched a bed. A pale light, rising in the outer air, fell straight upon the bed; and on it, unwatched, unwept, uncared for, was the body of this plundered, unknown man.

"Spirit, let me see some tenderness connected with a death, or this dark chamber, Spirit, will be forever present to me."

The Ghost conducted him to poor Bob Cratchit's house,—the dwelling he had visited before,—and found the mother and the children seated round the fire.

Quiet. Very quiet. The noisy little Cratchits were as still as statues in one corner, and sat looking up at Peter, who had a book before him. The mother and her daughters were engaged in needlework. But surely they were very quiet!

"And He took a child, and set him in the midst of them."

Where had Scrooge heard those words? He had not dreamed them. The boy must have read them out, as he and the Spirit crossed the threshold. Why did he not go on?

The mother laid her work upon the table, and put her hand up to her face.

“The color hurts my eyes,” she said.

The color? Ah, poor Tiny Tim!

“They’re better now again,” said Cratchit’s wife. “It makes them weak by candlelight; and I wouldn’t show weak eyes to your father when he comes home, for the world. It must be near his time.”

“Past it, rather,” Peter answered, shutting up his book. “But I think he has walked a little slower than he used, these few last evenings, mother.”

“I have known him walk with—I have known him walk with Tiny Tim upon his shoulder very fast indeed.”

“And so have I,” cried Peter. “Often.”

“And so have I,” exclaimed another. So had all.

“But he was very light to carry,” she resumed, intent upon her work, “and his father loved him so, that it was no trouble,—no trouble. And there is your father at the door!”

She hurried out to meet him; and little Bob in his comforter—he had need of it, poor fellow—came in. His tea was ready for him on the hob, and they all tried who should help him to it most. Then the two young Cratchits got upon his knees, and laid, each child, a little cheek against his face, as if they said, “Don’t mind it father. Don’t be grieved!”

Bob was very cheerful with them, and spoke

pleasantly to all the family. He looked at the work upon the table, and praised the industry and speed of Mrs. Cratchit and the girls. They would be done long before Sunday, he said.

“Sunday! You went to-day, then, Robert?” said his wife.

“Yes, my dear,” returned Bob. “I wish you could have gone. It would have done you good to see how green a place it is. But you’ll see it often. I promised him that I would walk there on a Sunday. My little, little child!” cried Bob. “My little child!”

He broke down all at once. He couldn’t help it. If he could have helped it, he and his child would have been farther apart, perhaps, than they were.

“Specter,” said Scrooge, “something informs me that our parting moment is at hand. I know it, but I know not how. Tell me what man that was with the covered face whom we saw lying dead?”

The Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come conveyed him to a dismal, wretched, ruinous church-yard.

The Spirit stood among the graves, and pointed down to One.

“Before I draw nearer to that stone to which you point,” said Scrooge, “answer me one question. Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or are they shadows of the things that May be only?”

Still the Ghost pointed downward to the grave by which it stood.

"Men's courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead," said Scrooge. "But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me!"

The Spirit was immovable as ever.

Scrooge crept towards it, trembling as he went; and, following the finger, read upon the stone of the neglected grave his own name,—EBENEZER SCROOGE.

"Am *I* that man who lay upon the bed?" he cried, upon his knees. "No, Spirit! Oh, no, no!"

"Spirit!" he cried, tight clutching at its robe, "hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been but for this intercourse. Why show me this, if I am past all hope?"

For the first time the kind hand faltered.

"I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!"

Holding up his hands in one last prayer to have his fate reversed, he saw an alteration in the Phantom's hood and dress. It shrunk, collapsed, and dwindled down into a bedpost.

STAVE FIVE

THE END OF IT

YES, and the bedpost was his own. The bed was his own, the room was his own. Best and happiest of all, the Time before him was his own, to make amends in !

“I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future ! ” Scrooge repeated, as he scrambled out of bed. “The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. O Jacob Marley ! Heaven and the Christmas time be praised for this ! I say it on my knees, old Jacob ; on my knees ! ”

He was so fluttered and so glowing with his good intentions, that his broken voice would scarcely answer to his call. He had been sobbing violently in his conflict with the Spirit, and his face was wet with tears.

“They are not torn down,” cried Scrooge, folding one of his bed-curtains in his arms,—“they are not torn down, rings and all. They are here — I am here — the shadows of the things that would have been may be dispelled. They will be. I know they will ! ”

His hands were busy with his garments all this time ; turning them inside out, putting them on

upside down, tearing them, mislaying them, making them parties to every kind of extravagance.

"I don't know what to do!" cried Scrooge, laughing and crying in the same breath, and making a perfect Laocoön of himself with his stockings. "I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy. I am as giddy as a drunken man. A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world! Hallo here! Whoop! Hallo!"

He had frisked into the sitting-room, and was now standing there, perfectly winded.

"There's the saucepan that the gruel was in!" cried Scrooge, starting off again, and going round the fireplace. "There's the door by which the Ghost of Jacob Marley entered! There's the corner where the Ghost of Christmas Present sat! There's the window where I saw the wandering Spirits! It's all right, it's all true, it all happened. Ha, ha, ha!"

He was checked in his transports by the churches ringing out the lustiest peals he had ever heard.

Running to the window, he opened it, and put out his head. No fog, no mist; clear, bright, stirring, golden day.

"What's to-day?" cried Scrooge, calling downward to a boy in Sunday clothes, who perhaps had loitered in to look about him.

"Eh?" returned the boy, with all his might of wonder.

" What's to-day, my fine fellow ? " said Scrooge.

" To-day ! " replied the boy. " Why, CHRISTMAS DAY."

" It's Christmas Day ! " said Scrooge to himself.
" I haven't missed it. Hallo, my fine fellow ! "

" Hallo ! " returned the boy.

" Do you know the Poulterer's, in the next street but one, at the corner ? " Scrooge inquired.

" I should hope I did, " replied the lad.

" An intelligent boy ! " said Scrooge. " A remarkable boy ! Do you know whether they've sold the prize Turkey that was hanging up there ? Not the little prize Turkey — the big one ? "

" What, the one as big as me ? " returned the boy.

" What a delightful boy ! " said Scrooge. " It's a pleasure to talk to him. Yes, my buck ! "

" It's hanging there now, " replied the boy.

" Is it ? said Scrooge. Go and buy it."

" Walk-ER ! "¹ exclaimed the boy.

" No, no, I am in earnest. Go and buy it, and tell 'em to bring it here, that I may give them the directions where to take it. Come back with the man, and I'll give you a shilling. Come back with him in less than five minutes, and I'll give you half a crown ! "

The boy was off like a shot.

" I'll send it to Bob Cratchit's ! He shan't

¹ A slang word which shows that you are incredulous. Who Walker was is unknown, but he evidently was not noted as a truth teller.

know who sends it. It's twice the size of Tiny Tim. Joe Miller never made such a joke as sending it to Bob's will be!"

The hand in which he wrote the address was not a steady one ; but write it he did, somehow, and went downstairs to open the street door, ready for the coming of the poult erer's man.

It was a Turkey ! He never could have stood upon his legs, that bird. He would have snapped 'em short off in a minute, like sticks of sealing-wax.

Scrooge dressed himself "all in his best," and at last got out into the streets. The people were by this time pouring forth, as he had seen them with the Ghost of Christmas Present ; and walking with his hands behind him, Scrooge regarded every one with a delighted smile. He looked so irresistibly pleasant, in a word, that three or four good-humored fellows said, "Good morning, sir ! A merry Christmas to you !" And Scrooge said often afterwards, that of all the blithe sounds he had ever heard, those were the blithest in his ears.

In the afternoon, he turned his steps towards his nephew's house.

He passed the door a dozen times before he had the courage to go up and knock. But he made a dash, and did it.

"Is your master at home, my dear ?" said Scrooge to the girl. Nice girl ! Very.

"Yes, sir."

“Where is he, my love?” said Scrooge.

“He’s in the dining room, sir, along with the mistress.”

“He knows me,” said Scrooge, with his hand already on the dining room lock. “I’ll go in here, my dear.”

“Fred!” said Scrooge.

Dear heart alive, how his niece by marriage started! Scrooge had forgotten, for the moment, about her sitting in the corner with the footstool, or he wouldn’t have done it, on any account.

“Why, bless my soul!” cried Fred, “who’s that?”

“It’s I. Your Uncle Scrooge. I have come to dinner. Will you let me in, Fred?”

Let him in! It is a mercy he didn’t shake his arm off. He was at home in five minutes. Nothing could be heartier. His niece looked just the same. So did Topper when *he* came. So did the plump sister, when *she* came. So did every one, when *they* came. Wonderful party, wonderful games, wonderful unanimity, won-der-ful happiness!

But he was early at the office next morning. Oh, he was early there! If he could only be there first, and catch Bob Cratchit coming late! That was the thing he had set his heart upon.

And he did it. The clock struck nine. No Bob. A quarter past. No Bob. Bob was full

eighteen minutes and a half behind his time. Scrooge sat with his door wide open, that he might see him come into the tank.

Bob's hat was off before he opened the door ; his comforter, too. He was on his stool in a jiffy ; driving away with his pen, as if he were trying to overtake nine o'clock.

" Hallo ! " growled Scrooge, in his accustomed voice as near as he could feign it. " What do you mean by coming here at this time of day ? "

" I am very sorry, sir," said Bob. " I *am* behind my time."

" You are ? " repeated Scrooge. " Yes. I think you are. Step this way, sir, if you please."

" It's only once a year, sir," pleaded Bob, appearing from the tank. " It shall not be repeated. I was making rather merry yesterday, sir."

" Now, I'll tell you what, my friend. I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And therefore," Scrooge continued, leaping from his stool, and giving Bob such a dig in the waist-coat that he staggered back into the tank again, — " and therefore, I am about to raise your salary ! "

Bob trembled, and got a little nearer to the ruler.

" A merry Christmas, Bob ! " said Scrooge, with an earnestness that could not be mistaken, as he clapped him on the back. " A merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you for many a year ! I'll raise your salary, and endeavor

to assist your struggling family, and we will discuss your affairs this very afternoon, over a Christmas bowl of smoking bishop, Bob ! Make up the fires, and buy another coal scuttle before you dot another i, Bob Cratchit !”

Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more ; and to Tiny Tim, who did NOT die, he was a second father. He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough in the good old world. Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but his own heart laughed, and that was quite enough for him.

He had no further intercourse with Spirits, but lived in that respect upon the total abstinence principle ever afterwards ; and it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us ! And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God bless us, every one !

THE HOUSE AND THE BRAIN

BY E. BULWER LYTTON

A FRIEND of mine, who is a man of letters and a philosopher, said to me one day, as if between jest and earnest, “Fancy ! since we last met I have discovered a haunted house in the midst of London.”

“Really haunted ? and by what,—ghosts ?”

“Well, I can’t answer these questions ; all I know is this : six weeks ago I and my wife were in search of a furnished apartment. Passing a quiet street, we saw on the window of one of the houses a bill, ‘Apartments Furnished.’ The situation suited us ; we entered the house, liked the rooms, engaged them by the week, and left them the third day. No power on earth could have reconciled my wife to stay longer ; and I don’t wonder at it.”

“What did you see ?”

“Excuse me ; I have no desire to be ridiculed as a superstitious dreamer, nor, on the other hand, could I ask you to accept on my affirmation what you would hold to be incredible, without the evidence of your own senses. Let me only say this :

it was not so much what we saw or heard (in which you might fairly suppose that we were the dupes of our own excited fancy, or the victims of imposture in others) that drove us away, as it was an undefinable terror which seized both of us whenever we passed by the door of a certain unfurnished room, in which we neither saw nor heard anything ; and the strangest marvel of all was, that for once in my life I agreed with my wife, silly woman though she be, and allowed after the third night that it was impossible to stay a fourth in that house. Accordingly, on the fourth morning I summoned the woman who kept the house and attended on us, and told her that the rooms did not quite suit us, and we would not stay out our week. She said dryly, ‘I know why ; you have stayed longer than any other lodger. Few ever stayed a second night ; none before you a third. But I take it they have been very kind to you.’

“‘They,—who?’ I asked, affecting a smile.

“‘Why, they who haunt the house, whoever they are ; I don’t mind them ; I remember them many years ago, when I lived in this house not as a servant ; but I know they will be the death of me some day. I don’t care,—I’m old and must die soon anyhow ; and then I shall be with them, and in this house still.’ The woman spoke with so dreary a calmness, that really it was a sort of awe that prevented my conversing with her fur-

ther. I paid for my week, and too happy were I and my wife to get off so cheaply."

" You excite my curiosity," said I ; " nothing I should like better than to sleep in a haunted house. Pray give me the address of the one which you left so ignominiously."

My friend gave me the address ; and when we parted I walked straight toward the house thus indicated.

It is situated on the north side of Oxford Street,¹ in a dull but respectable thoroughfare. I found the house shut up ; no bill at the window, and no response to my knock. As I was turning away, a beer-boy, collecting pewter pots at the neighboring areas,² said to me, " Do you want any one at that house, sir ? "

" Yes, I heard it was to be let."

" Let ! Why, the woman who kept it is dead ; has been dead these three weeks ; and no one can be found to stay there, though Mr. J—— offered ever so much. He offered mother, who chars³ for him, £1 a week just to open and shut the windows, and she would not."

" Would not ! and why ? "

¹ A long street to the north of that part of London best known to the world. North of Oxford Street there is much London, but as a rule it is not so interesting as the part between Oxford Street and Holborn, its continuation, and the river.

² The little spaces in front of the houses, usually lower than the street, by which one gets to the basement doors.

³ The same word as the New England *chore*. A charwoman is one who comes in to do house-keeping work.

"The house is haunted; and the old woman who kept it was found dead in her bed with her eyes wide open. They say the Devil strangled her."

"Pooh! You speak of Mr. J——. Is he the owner of the house?"

"Yes."

"Where does he live?"

"In G—— Street, No. —."

"What is he? — in any business?"

"No, sir; nothing particular; a single gentleman."

I gave the pot-boy the gratuity earned by his liberal information, and proceeded to Mr. J—— in G—— Street, which was close by the street that boasted the haunted house. I was lucky enough to find Mr. J—— at home; an elderly man with intelligent countenance and prepossessing manners.

I communicated my name and my business frankly. I said I heard the house was considered to be haunted; that I had a strong desire to examine a house with so equivocal a reputation; that I should be greatly obliged if he would allow me to hire it, though only for a night. I was willing to pay for that privilege whatever he might be inclined to ask. "Sir," said Mr. J—— with great courtesy, "the house is at your service for as short or as long a time as you please. Rent is out of the question; the obligation will be on

my side, should you be able to discover the cause of the strange phenomena which at present deprive it of all value. I cannot let it, for I cannot even get a servant to keep it in order or answer the door. Unluckily, the house is haunted, if I may use that expression, not only by night but by day; though at night the disturbances are of a more unpleasant and sometimes of a more alarming character. The poor old woman who died in it three weeks ago was a pauper whom I took out of a workhouse; for in her childhood she had been known to some of my family, and had once been in such good circumstances that she had rented that house of my uncle. She was a woman of superior education and strong mind, and was the only person I could ever induce to remain in the house. Indeed, since her death, which was sudden, and the coroner's inquest, which gave it a notoriety in the neighborhood, I have so despaired of finding any person to take charge of it, much more a tenant, that I would willingly let it rent free for a year to any one who would pay its rates¹ and taxes."

"How long ago did the house acquire this character?"

"That I can scarcely tell you, but many years since; the old woman I spoke of said it was haunted when she rented it, between thirty and forty years ago. The fact is, that my life has been

¹ Rates differ from taxes in being local.

spent in the East Indies, and in the civil service of the Company.¹ I returned to England last year, on inheriting the fortune of an uncle, amongst whose possessions was the house in question. I found it shut up and uninhabited. I was told that it was haunted, and no one would inhabit it. I smiled at what seemed to me so idle a story. I spent some money in repainting and roofing it, added to its old-fashioned furniture a few modern articles, advertised it, and obtained a lodger for a year. He was a colonel retired on half pay. He came in with his family, a son and a daughter, and four or five servants; they all left the house the next day: and although they deponed² that they had all seen something different, that something was equally terrible to all. I really could not in conscience sue, or even blame, the colonel for breach of agreement. Then I put in the old woman I have spoken of, and she was empowered to let the house in apartments. I never had one lodger who stayed more than three days. I do not tell you their stories; to no two lodgers have exactly the same phenomena been repeated. It is better that you should judge for yourself, than enter the house with an imagina-

¹ The English possessions in India were formerly managed by the East India Company. By 1858 it became clear that the affair was too vast to be carried on by a private company, and the English Government took over the charge of India and the East Indies. The Company had a military and a civil service.

² Stated, more especially, upon oath.

tion influenced by previous narratives ; only be prepared to see and to hear something or other, and take whatever precautions you yourself please."

"Have you never had a curiosity yourself to pass a night in that house?"

"Yes ; I passed, not a night, but three hours in broad daylight alone in that house. My curiosity is not satisfied, but it is quenched. I have no desire to renew the experiment. You cannot complain, you see, sir, that I am not sufficiently candid ; and unless your interest be exceedingly eager and your nerves unusually strong, I honestly add that I advise you *not* to pass a night in that house."

"My interest *is* exceedingly keen," said I ; "and though only a coward will boast of his nerves in situations wholly unfamiliar to him, yet my nerves have been seasoned in such variety of danger that I have the right to rely on them, even in a haunted house."

Mr. J—— said very little more ; he took the keys of the house out of his bureau, and gave them to me ; and, thanking him cordially for his frankness and his urbane concession to my wish, I carried off my prize.

Impatient for the experiment, as soon as I reached home I summoned my confidential servant,—a young man of gay spirits, fearless temper, and as free from superstitious prejudice as any one I could think of.

"F——," said I, "you remember in Germany how disappointed we were at not finding a ghost in that old castle, which was said to be haunted by a headless apparition? Well, I have heard of a house in London which, I have reason to hope, is decidedly haunted. I mean to sleep there to-night. From what I hear, there is no doubt that something will allow itself to be seen or to be heard,—something perhaps excessively horrible. Do you think, if I take you with me, I may rely on your presence of mind, whatever may happen?"

"O sir! pray trust me!" said he, grinning with delight.

"Very well, then, here are the keys of the house; this is the address. Go now, select for me any bedroom you please; and since the house has not been inhabited for weeks, make up a good fire, air the bed well, see, of course, that there are candles as well as fuel. Take with you my revolver and my dagger,—so much for my weapons,—arm yourself equally well; and if we are not a match for a dozen ghosts, we shall be but a sorry couple of Englishmen."

I was engaged for the rest of the day on business so urgent that I had not leisure to think much on the nocturnal adventure to which I had plighted my honor. I dined alone and very late, and while dining read, as is my habit. The volume I selected was one of Macaulay's essays. I thought to myself that I would take the book

with me ; there was so much of healthfulness in the style, and practical life in the subjects, that it would serve as an antidote against the influences of superstitious fancy.

Accordingly, about half past nine, I put the book into my pocket, and strolled leisurely toward the haunted house. I took with me a favorite dog ; an exceedingly sharp, bold, and vigilant bull-terrier, a dog fond of prowling about strange ghostly corners and passages at night in search of rats, a dog of dogs for a ghost.

It was a summer night, but chilly, the sky somewhat gloomy and overcast ; still there was a moon,—faint and sickly, but still a moon ; and if the clouds permitted, after midnight it would be brighter.

I reached the house, knocked, and my servant opened with a cheerful smile.

“ All right, sir, and very comfortable.”

“ Oh ! ” said I, rather disappointed ; “ have you not seen or heard anything remarkable ? ”

“ Well, sir, I must own I have heard something queer.”

“ What ? — what ? ”

“ The sound of feet pattering behind me ; and once or twice small noises like whispers close at my ear ; nothing more.”

“ You are not at all frightened ? ”

“ I ! not a bit of it, sir ! ” And the man’s bold look reassured me on one point, namely,

that, happen what might, he would not desert me.

We were in the hall, the street door closed, and my attention was now drawn to my dog. He had at first run in eagerly enough, but had sneaked back to the door, and was scratching and whining to get out. After I had patted him on the head and encouraged him gently, the dog seemed to reconcile himself to the situation, and followed me and F—— through the house, but keeping close at my heels, instead of hurrying inquisitively in advance, which was his usual and normal habit in all strange places. We first visited the subterranean apartments, the kitchen and other offices,¹ and especially the cellars, in which last were two or three bottles of wine still left in a bin, covered with cobwebs, and evidently, by their appearance, undisturbed for many years. It was clear that the ghosts were not winebibbers. For the rest, we discovered nothing of interest. There was a gloomy little back yard, with very high walls. The stones of this yard were very damp; and what with the damp, and what with the dust and smoke-grime on the pavement, our feet left a slight impression where we passed. And now appeared the first strange phenomenon witnessed by myself in this strange abode. I saw, just before me, the print of a foot

¹ The common word in England for that part of the house devoted to the household work.

suddenly form itself, as it were. I stopped, caught hold of my servant, and pointed to it. In advance of that footprint as suddenly dropped another. We both saw it. I advanced quickly to the place; the footprint kept advancing before me; a small footprint,—the foot of a child; the impression was too faint thoroughly to distinguish the shape, but it seemed to us both that it was the print of a naked foot. This phenomenon ceased when we arrived at the opposite wall, nor did it repeat itself when we returned. We remounted the stairs, and entered the rooms on the ground floor,—a dining-parlor, a small back parlor, and a still smaller third room, that had probably been appropriated to a footman,—all still as death. We then visited the drawing-rooms, which seemed fresh and new. In the front room I seated myself in an armchair. F— placed on the table the candlestick with which he had lighted us. I told him to shut the door. As he turned to do so, a chair opposite to me moved from the wall quickly and noiselessly, and dropped itself about a yard from my own chair, immediately fronting it.

“Why, this is better than the turning tables,”¹ said I, with a half-laugh; and as I laughed, my dog put back his head and howled.

¹ A spiritualistic phenomenon which excited much attention in the middle of the last century. Persons sat about a table with their hands on the top and just touching each other: then the table began to turn round.

F——, coming back, had not observed the movement of the chair. He employed himself now in stilling the dog. I continued to gaze on the chair, and fancied I saw on it a pale, blue, misty outline of a human figure; but an outline so indistinct that I could only distrust my own vision. The dog was now quiet.

“Put back the chair opposite to me,” said I to F——, “put it back to the wall.”

F—— obeyed. “Was that you, sir?” said he, turning abruptly.

“I,—what?”

“Why, something struck me. I felt it sharply on the shoulder, just here.”

“No,” said I; “but we have jugglers present; and though we may not discover their tricks, we shall catch *them* before they frighten *us*.”

We did not stay long in the drawing-rooms; in fact, they felt so damp and so chilly that I was glad to get to the fire upstairs. We locked the doors of the drawing-rooms,—a precaution which, I should observe, we had taken with all the rooms we had searched below. The bedroom my servant had selected for me was the best on the floor; a large one, with two windows fronting the street. The four-posted bed, which took up no inconsiderable space, was opposite to the fire, which burned clear and bright; a door in the wall to the left, between the bed and the window, communicated with the room which my servant

appropriated to himself. This last was a small room with a sofa-bed, and had no communication with the landing-place; no other door but that which conducted to the bedroom I was to occupy. On either side of my fireplace was a cupboard, without locks, flush with the wall, and covered with the same dull-brown paper. We examined these cupboards; only hooks to suspend female dresses,—nothing else. We sounded the walls; evidently solid,—the outer walls of the building. Having finished the survey of these apartments, warmed myself a few moments, and lighted my cigar, I then, still accompanied by F—, went forth to complete my reconnoitre. In the landing-place there was another door; it was closed firmly. "Sir," said my servant in surprise, "I unlocked this door with all the others when I first came; it cannot have got locked from the inside, for it is a—"

Before he had finished his sentence, the door, which neither of us then was touching, opened quietly of itself. We looked at each other a single instant. The same thought seized both; some human agency might be detected here. I rushed in first, my servant followed. A small, blank, dreary room without furniture, a few empty boxes and hampers in a corner, a small window, the shutters closed,—not even a fireplace,—no other door but that by which we had entered, no carpet on the floor, and the

floor seemed very old, uneven, worm-eaten, mended here and there, as was shown by the whiter patches on the wood ; but no living being, and no visible place in which a living being could have hidden. As we stood gazing round, the door by which we had entered closed as quietly as it had before opened ; we were imprisoned.

For the first time I felt a creep of undefinable horror. Not so my servant. "Why, they don't think to trap us, sir ; I could break that trumpery door with a kick of my foot."

"Try first if it will open to your hand," said I, shaking off the vague apprehension that had seized me, "while I open the shutters and see what is without."

I unbarred the shutters : the window looked on the little back yard I have before described ; there was no ledge without, nothing but sheer descent. No man getting out of that window would have found any footing till he had fallen on the stones below.

F—— meanwhile was vainly attempting to open the door. He now turned round to me and asked my permission to use force. And I should here state, in justice to the servant, that, far from evincing any superstitious terror, his nerve, composure, and even gayety amidst circumstances so extraordinary, compelled my admiration, and made me congratulate myself on having secured a companion in every way fitted

to the occasion. I willingly gave him the permission he required. But, though he was a remarkably strong man, his force was as idle as his milder efforts; the door did not even shake to his stoutest kick. Breathless and panting, he desisted. I then tried the door myself, equally in vain. As I ceased from the effort, again that creep of horror came over me; but this time it was more cold and stubborn. I felt as if some strange and ghastly exhalation were rising from the chinks of that rugged floor and filling the atmosphere with a venomous influence hostile to human life. The door now very slowly and quietly opened as of its own accord. We precipitated ourselves into the landing-place. We both saw a large, pale light—as large as the human figure, but shapeless and unsubstantial—move before us and ascend the stairs that led from the landing into the attics. I followed the light, and my servant followed me. It entered, to the right of the landing, a small garret, of which the door stood open. I entered in the same instant. The light then collapsed into a small globule, exceedingly brilliant and vivid; rested a moment on a bed in the corner, quivered, and vanished. We approached the bed and examined it,—a half-tester,¹

¹ A tester is a canopy over a bed. In a four-poster (p. 78) it is supported by the four posts. Curtains then convert the bed into a separate little room, such an arrangement being very comfortable in the half-heated houses of our ancestors. A half-tester bedstead had only a half canopy, supported by two posts.

such as is commonly found in attics devoted to servants. On the drawers that stood near it we perceived an old faded silk kerchief, with the needle still left in the rent half repaired. The kerchief was covered with dust; probably it had belonged to the old woman who had last died in that house, and this might have been her sleeping room. I had sufficient curiosity to open the drawers; there were a few odds and ends of female dress, and two letters tied round with a narrow ribbon of faded yellow. I took the liberty to possess myself of the letters. We found nothing else in the room worth noticing, nor did the light reappear; but we distinctly heard, as we turned to go, a patterning footfall on the floor just before us. We went through the other attics (in all four), the footfall still preceding us. Nothing to be seen, nothing but the footfall heard. I had the letters in my hand; just as I was descending the stairs I distinctly felt my wrist seized, and a faint, soft effort made to draw the letters from my clasp. I only held them the more tightly, and the effort ceased.

We regained the bedchamber appropriated to myself, and I then remarked that my dog had not followed us when we had left it. He was thrusting himself close to the fire and trembling. I was impatient to examine the letters; and while I read them my servant opened a little box in which he had deposited the weapons I had ordered him

to bring, took them out, placed them on a table close at my bed-head, and then occupied himself in soothing the dog, who, however, seemed to heed him very little.

The letters were short ; they were dated,—the dates exactly thirty-five years ago. They were evidently from a lover to his mistress, or a husband to some young wife. Not only the terms of expression, but a distinct reference to a former voyage indicated the writer to have been a seafarer. The spelling and handwriting were those of a man imperfectly educated ; but still the language itself was forcible. In the expressions of endearment there was a kind of rough, wild love ; but here and there were dark, unintelligible hints at some secret not of love,—some secret that seemed of crime. “We ought to love each other,” was one of the sentences I remember, “for how every one else would execrate us if all was known.” Again : “Don’t let any one be in the same room with you at night,—you talk in your sleep.” And again : “What’s done can’t be undone : and I tell you there’s nothing against us, unless the dead could come to life.” Here was interlined, in a better handwriting (a female’s), “They do !” At the end of the letter latest in date the same female hand had written these words : “Lost at sea the 4th of June, the same day as — ”

I put down the letters, and began to muse over their contents.

Fearing, however, that the train of thought into which I fell might unsteady my nerves, I fully determined to keep my mind in a fit state to cope with whatever of marvelous the advancing night might bring forth. I roused myself, laid the letters on the table, stirred up the fire, which was still bright and cheering, and opened my volume of Macaulay. I read quietly enough, till about half-past eleven. I then threw myself dressed upon the bed, and told my servant he might retire to his own room, but must keep himself awake. I bade him leave open the doors between the two rooms. Thus, alone, I kept two candles burning on the table by my bed-head. I placed my watch beside the weapons, and calmly resumed my Macaulay. Opposite to me the fire burned clear ; and on the hearth-rug, seemingly asleep, lay the dog. In about twenty minutes I felt an exceedingly cold air pass by my cheek, like a sudden draught. I fancied the door to my right, communicating with the landing-place, must have got open ; but no, it was closed. I then turned my glance to the left, and saw the flame of the candles violently swayed as by a wind. At the same moment the watch beside the revolver softly slid from the table, — softly, softly, — no visible hand, — it was gone. I sprang up, seizing the revolver with the one hand, the dagger with the other : I was not willing that my weapons should share the fate of the watch. Thus armed, I looked round

the floor : no sign of the watch. Three slow, loud, distinct knocks were now heard at the bed-head ; my servant called out, "Is that you, sir?"

"No ; be on your guard."

The dog now roused himself and sat on his haunches, his ears moving quickly backward and forward. He kept his eye fixed on me with a look so strange that he concentrated all my attention on himself. Slowly he rose, all his hair bristling, and stood perfectly rigid, and with the same wild stare. I had no time, however, to examine the dog. Presently my servant emerged from his room ; and if I ever saw horror in the human face, it was then. I should not have recognized him had we met in the streets, so altered was every lineament. He passed by me quickly, saying in a whisper that seemed scarcely to come from his lips, "Run ! run ! it is after me !" He gained the door to the landing, pulled it open, and rushed forth. I followed him into the landing involuntarily, calling him to stop ; but, without heeding me, he bounded down the stairs, clinging to the balusters and taking several steps at a time. I heard, where I stood, the street door open, heard it again clap to. I was left alone in the haunted house.

It was but for a moment that I remained undecided whether or not to follow my servant ; pride and curiosity alike forbade so dastardly a flight. I re-entered my room, closing the door after me,

and proceeded cautiously into the interior chamber. I encountered nothing to justify my servant's terror. I again carefully examined the walls, to see if there were any concealed door. I could find no trace of one,—not even a seam in the dull-brown paper with which the room was hung. How then had the THING, whatever it was, which had so scared him, obtained ingress, except through my own chamber?

I returned to my room, shut and locked the door that opened upon the interior one, and stood on the hearth, expectant and prepared. I now perceived that the dog had slunk into an angle of the wall, and was pressing close against it, as if literally striving to force his way into it. I approached the animal and spoke to it; the poor brute was evidently beside itself with terror. It showed all its teeth, the slaver dropping from its jaws, and would certainly have bitten me if I had touched it. It did not seem to recognize me. Whoever has seen at the Zoölogical Gardens a rabbit fascinated by a serpent, cowering in a corner, may form some idea of the anguish which the dog exhibited. Finding all efforts to soothe the animal in vain, and fearing that his bite might be as venomous in that state as if in the madness of hydrophobia, I left him alone, placed my weapons on the table beside the fire, seated myself, and recommenced my Macaulay,

Perhaps, in order not to appear seeking credit for a courage, or rather a coolness, which the

reader may conceive I exaggerate, I may be pardoned if I pause to indulge in one or two egotistical remarks.

As I hold presence of mind, or what is called courage, to be precisely proportioned to familiarity with the circumstances that lead to it, so I should say that I had been long sufficiently familiar with all experiments that appertain to the marvelous. I had witnessed many very extraordinary phenomena in various parts of the world, — phenomena that would be either totally disbelieved if I stated them, or ascribed to supernatural agencies. Now, my theory is, that the supernatural is the impossible, and that what is called supernatural is only a something in the laws of nature of which we have been hitherto ignorant. Therefore, if a ghost rise before me, I have not the right to say, "So, then, the supernatural is possible," but rather, "So, then, the apparition of a ghost is, contrary to received opinion, within the laws of nature, namely, not supernatural."

Now, in all that I had hitherto witnessed, and indeed in all the wonders which the amateurs¹ of mystery in our age record as facts, a material living agency is always required. On the Continent you will find still magicians who assert that they can raise spirits. Assume for the moment that they assert truly, still the living material form of the magician is present ; and he is the material

¹ Like *dilettante*, the word means at bottom a lover.

agency by which, from some constitutional peculiarities, certain strange phenomena are represented to your natural senses.

Accept, again, as truthful the tales of spirit manifestation in America,¹— musical or other sounds, writings on paper, produced by no discernible hand, articles of furniture moved without apparent human agency, or the actual sight and touch of hands, to which no bodies seem to belong,— still there must be found the medium, or living being, with constitutional peculiarities capable of obtaining these signs. In fine, in all such marvels, supposing even that there is no imposture, there must be a human being like ourselves, by whom or through whom the effects presented to human beings are produced. It is so with the now familiar phenomena of mesmerism² or electro-biology ;³ the mind of the person operated on is affected through a material living agent. Nor, supposing it true that a mesmerized patient can respond to the will or passes of a mesmerizer a hundred miles

¹ Spiritualism in America came prominently before the public about 1850, and for a good many years aroused much attention. It has always shared public interest with other phenomena, some of which are mentioned in the following lines.

² Or animal magnetism. From Mesmer (1733–1815) a man who brought forward examples of hypnotic power before any scientific investigation had been given to the matter; there is mention of them p. 101.

³ A name formerly given to a kind of mesmeric phenomena. It has nothing in common with what we now think of as electric or biological. See, however, p. 103.

distant, is the response less occasioned by a material being. It may be through a material fluid, call it Electric, call it Odic, call it what you will, which has the power of traversing space and passing obstacles, that the material effect is communicated from one to the other. Hence, all that I had hitherto witnessed, or expected to witness, in this strange house, I believed to be occasioned through some agency or medium as mortal as myself ; and this idea necessarily prevented the awe with which those who regard as supernatural things that are not within the ordinary operations of nature might have been impressed by the adventures of that memorable night.

As, then, it was my conjecture that all that was presented, or would be presented, to my senses, must originate in some human being gifted by constitution with the power so to present them, and having some motive so to do, I felt an interest in my theory which, in its way, was rather philosophical than superstitious. And I can sincerely say that I was in as tranquil a temper for observation as any practical experimentalist could be in awaiting the effects of some rare, though perhaps perilous, chemical combination. Of course, the more I kept my mind detached from fancy, the more the temper fitted for observation would be obtained ; and I therefore riveted eye and thought on the strong daylight sense in the page of my Macaulay.

I now became aware that something interposed between the page and the light: the page was overshadowed. I looked up and I saw what I shall find it very difficult, perhaps impossible, to describe.

It was a darkness shaping itself out of the air in very undefined outline. I cannot say it was of a human form, and yet it had more of a resemblance to a human form, or rather shadow, than anything else. As it stood, wholly apart and distinct from the air and the light around it, its dimensions seemed gigantic; the summit nearly touched the ceiling. While I gazed, a feeling of intense cold seized me. An iceberg before me could not more have chilled me; nor could the cold of an iceberg have been more purely physical. I feel convinced that it was not the cold caused by fear. As I continued to gaze, I thought—but this I cannot say with precision—that I distinguished two eyes looking down on me from the height. One moment I seemed to distinguish them clearly, the next they seemed gone; but two rays of a pale blue light frequently shot through the darkness, as from the height on which I half believed, half doubted, that I had encountered the eyes.

I strove to speak; my voice utterly failed me. I could only think to myself, “Is this fear? it is *not* fear!” I strove to rise, in vain; I felt as if weighed down by an irresistible force. Indeed,

my impression was that of an immense and overwhelming power opposed to my volition ; that sense of utter inadequacy to cope with a force beyond men's, which one may feel *physically* in a storm at sea, in a conflagration, or when confronting some terrible wild beast, or rather, perhaps, the shark of the ocean, I felt *morally*. Opposed to my will was another will, as far superior to its strength as storm, fire, and shark are superior in material force to the force of men.

And now, as this impression grew on me, now came, at last, horror,—horror to a degree that no words can convey. Still I retained pride, if not courage ; and in my own mind I said, “This is horror, but it is not fear ; unless I fear, I cannot be harmed ; my reason rejects this thing ; it is an illusion, I do not fear.” With a violent effort I succeeded at last in stretching out my hand toward the weapon on the table ; as I did so, on the arm and shoulder I received a strange shock, and my arm fell to my side powerless. And now, to add to my horror, the light began slowly to wane from the candles ; they were not, as it were, extinguished, but their flame seemed very gradually withdrawn ; it was the same with the fire, the light was extracted from the fuel ; in a few minutes the room was in utter darkness. The dread that came over me to be thus in the dark with that dark thing, whose power was so intensely felt, brought a reaction of nerve. In fact, terror had reached that

climax, that either my senses must have deserted me, or I must have burst through the spell. I did burst through it. I found voice, though the voice was a shriek. I remember that I broke forth with words like these, "I do not fear, my soul does not fear;" and at the same time I found strength to rise. Still in that profound gloom I rushed to one of the windows, tore aside the curtain, flung open the shutters; my first thought was, **LIGHT**. And when I saw the moon, high, clear, and calm, I felt a joy that almost compensated for the previous terror. There was the moon, there was also the light from the gas-lamps in the deserted, slumberous street. I turned to look back into the room; the moon penetrated its shadow very palely and partially, but still there was light. The dark thing, whatever it might be, was gone; except that I could yet see a dim shadow, which seemed the shadow of that shade, against the opposite wall.

My eye now rested on the table, and from under the table (which was without cloth or cover, an old mahogany round table) rose a hand, visible as far as the wrist. It was a hand, seemingly, as much of flesh and blood as my own, but the hand of an aged person, lean, wrinkled, small too, a woman's hand. That hand very softly closed on the two letters that lay on the table; hand and letters both vanished. Then came the same three loud, measured knocks I had heard at the bed-head

before this extraordinary drama had commenced.

As these sounds slowly ceased, I felt the whole room vibrate sensibly ; and at the far end rose, as from the floor, sparks or globules like bubbles of light, many-colored, — green, yellow, fire-red, azure, — up and down, to and fro, hither, thither, as tiny will-o'-the-wisps the sparks moved, slow or swift, each at its own caprice. A chair (as in the drawing-room below) was now advanced from the wall without apparent agency, and placed at the opposite side of the table. Suddenly, as forth from the chair, grew a shape, a woman's shape. It was distinct as a shape of life, ghastly as a shape of death. The face was that of youth, with a strange, mournful beauty ; the throat and shoulders were bare, the rest of the form in a loose robe of cloudy white. It began sleeking its long yellow hair, which fell over its shoulders ; its eyes were not turned toward me, but to the door ; it seemed listening, watching, waiting. The shadow of the shade in the background grew darker ; and again I thought I beheld the eyes gleaming out from the summit of the shadow, eyes fixed upon that shape.

As if from the door, though it did not open, grew out another shape, equally distinct, equally ghastly, — a man's shape, a young man's. It was in the dress of the last century, or rather in a likeness of such dress; for both the male shape and the female, though defined, were evidently

unsubstantial, impalpable,—simulacra, phantasms; and there was something incongruous, grotesque, yet fearful, in the contrast between the elaborate finery, the courtly precision of that old-fashioned garb, with its ruffles and lace and buckles, and the corpse-like aspect and ghost-like stillness of the flitting wearer. Just as the male shape approached the female, the dark shadow darted from the wall all three for a moment wrapped in darkness. When the pale light returned, the two phantoms were as if in the grasp of the shadow that towered between them, and there was a blood-stain on the breast of the female ; and the phantom male was leaning on its phantom sword, and blood seemed trickling fast from the ruffles, from the lace ; and the darkness of the intermediate shadow swallowed them up, they were gone. And again the bubbles of light shot, and sailed, and undulated, growing thicker and thicker and more wildly confused in their movements.

The closet door to the right of the fireplace now opened, and from the aperture came the form of a woman, aged. In her hand she held letters,—the very letters over which I had seen *the* hand close; and behind her I heard a footstep. She turned round as if to listen, and then she opened the letters and seemed to read: and over her shoulder I saw a livid face, the face as of a man long drowned,—bloated, bleached, seaweed tangled in its dripping hair; and at her feet lay a form as of a corpse, and beside the corpse cowered a child,

a miserable, squalid child, with famine in its cheeks and fear in its eyes. And as I looked in the old woman's face, the wrinkles and lines vanished, and it became a face of youth, — hard-eyed, stony, but still youth ; and the shadow darted forth and darkened over these phantoms, as it had darkened over the last.

Nothing now was left but the shadow, and on that my eyes were intently fixed, till again eyes grew out of the shadow,— malignant, serpent eyes. And the bubbles of light again rose and fell, and in their disordered, irregular, turbulent maze mingled with the wan moonlight. And now from these globules themselves, as from the shell of an egg, monstrous things burst out ; the air grew filled with them ; larvæ so bloodless and so hideous that I can in no way describe them, except to remind the reader of the swarming life which the solar microscope brings before his eyes in a drop of water,— things transparent, supple, agile, chasing each other, devouring each other, — forms like naught ever beheld by the naked eye. As the shapes were without symmetry, so their movements were without order. In their very vagrancies there was no sport; they came round me and round, thicker and faster and swifter, swarming over my head, crawling over my right arm, which was outstretched in involuntary command against all evil beings. Sometimes I felt myself touched, but not by them ; invisible hands touched

me. Once I felt the clutch as of cold, soft fingers at my throat. I was still equally conscious that if I gave way to fear I should be in bodily peril, and I concentrated all my faculties in the single focus of resisting, stubborn will. And I turned my sight from the shadow, above all from those strange serpent eyes,—eyes that had now become distinctly visible. For there, though in naught else around me, I was aware that there was a will, and a will of intense, creative, working evil, which might crush down my own.

The pale atmosphere in the room began now to redden as if in the air of some near conflagration. The larvæ grew lurid as things that live in fire. Again the room vibrated; again were heard the three measured knocks; and again all things were swallowed up in the darkness of the dark shadow, as if out of that darkness all had come, into that darkness all returned.

As the gloom receded, the shadow was wholly gone. Slowly as it had been withdrawn, the flame grew again into the candles on the table, again into the fuel in the grate. The whole room came once more calmly, healthfully into sight.

The two doors were still closed, the door communicating with the servant's room still locked. In the corner of the wall, into which he had convulsively niched himself, lay the dog. I called to him,—no movement; I approached,—the animal was dead; his eyes protruded, his tongue out of

his mouth, the froth gathered round his jaws. I took him in my arms ; I brought him to the fire ; I felt acute grief for the loss of my poor favorite, acute self-reproach ; I accused myself of his death ; I imagined he had died of fright. But what was my surprise on finding that his neck was actually broken,—actually twisted out of the vertebræ. Had this been done in the dark ? Must it not have been done by a hand human as mine ? Must there not have been a human agency all the while in that room ? Good cause to suspect it. I cannot tell. I cannot do more than state the fact fairly ; the reader may draw his own inference.

Another surprising circumstance,—my watch was restored to the table from which it had been so mysteriously withdrawn ; but it had stopped at the very moment it was so withdrawn ; nor, despite all the skill of the watchmaker, has it ever gone since : that is, it will go in a strange, erratic way for a few hours, and then comes to a dead stop ; it is worthless.

Nothing more chanced for the rest of the night ; nor, indeed, had I long to wait before the dawn broke. Not till it was broad daylight did I quit the haunted house. Before I did so, I revisited the little blind room in which my servant and I had been for a time imprisoned. I had a strong impression, for which I could not account, that from that room had originated the mechanism of the phenomena, if I may use the term, which had

been experienced in my chamber ; and though I entered it now in the clear day, with the sun peering through the filmy window, I still felt, as I stood on its floor, the creep of the horror which I had first experienced there the night before, and which had been so aggravated by what had passed in my own chamber. I could not, indeed, bear to stay more than half a minute within those walls. I descended the stairs, and again I heard the foot-fall before me ; and when I opened the street door I thought I could distinguish a very low laugh. I gained my own home, expecting to find my runaway servant there. But he had not presented himself ; nor did I hear more of him for three days, when I received a letter from him, dated from Liverpool, to this effect : —

“ HONORED SIR,— I humbly entreat your pardon, though I can scarcely hope that you will think I deserve it, unless — which Heaven forbid ! — you saw what I did. I feel that it will be years before I can recover myself ; and as to being fit for service, it is out of the question. I am therefore going to my brother-in-law at Melbourne. The ship sails to-morrow. Perhaps the long voyage may set me up. I do nothing now but start and tremble, and fancy it is behind me. I humbly beg you, honored sir, to order my clothes, and whatever wages are due to me, to be sent to my mother’s at Walworth : John knows her address.”

The letter ended with additional apologies, somewhat incoherent, and explanatory details as to effects that had been under the writer's charge.

This flight may perhaps warrant a suspicion that the man wished to go to Australia, and had been somehow or other fraudulently mixed up with the events of the night. I say nothing in refutation of that conjecture ; rather, I suggest it as one that would seem to many persons the most probable solution of improbable occurrences. My own theory remained unshaken. I returned in the evening to the house, to bring away in a hack cab the things I had left there, with my poor dog's body. In this task I was not disturbed, nor did any incident worth note befall me, except that still, on ascending and descending the stairs, I heard the same footfall in advance. On leaving the house, I went to Mr. J——'s. He was at home. I returned him the keys, told him that my curiosity was sufficiently gratified, and was about to relate quickly what had passed, when he stopped me and said, though with much politeness, that he had no longer any interest in a mystery which none had ever solved.

I determined at least to tell him of the two letters I had read, as well as of the extraordinary manner in which they had disappeared ; and I then inquired if he thought they had been addressed to the woman who had died in the house, and if there were anything in her early history

which could possibly confirm the dark suspicions to which the letters gave rise. Mr. J—— seemed startled, and, after musing a few moments, answered : “ I know but little of the woman’s earlier history, except, as I before told you, that her family were known to mine. But you revive some vague reminiscences to her prejudice. I will make inquiries, and inform you of their result. Still, even if we could admit the popular superstition that a person who had been either the perpetrator or the victim of dark crimes in life could revisit, as a restless spirit, the scene in which those crimes had been committed, I should observe that the house was infested by strange sights and sounds before the old woman died. You smile ; what would you say ? ”

“ I would say this : that I am convinced, if we could get to the bottom of these mysteries, we should find a living, human agency.”

“ What ! you believe it is all an imposture ? For what object ? ”

“ Not an imposture, in the ordinary sense of the word. If suddenly I were to sink into a deep sleep, from which you could not awake me, but in that deep sleep could answer questions with an accuracy which I could not pretend to when awake,— tell you what money you had in your pocket, nay, describe your very thoughts,— it is not necessarily an imposture, any more than it is necessarily supernatural. I should be, un-

consciously to myself, under a mesmeric influence, conveyed to me from a distance by a human being who had acquired power over me by previous *rappo^rt.*"

"Granting mesmerism, so far carried, to be a fact, you are right. And you would infer from this that a mesmerizer might produce the extraordinary effects you and others have witnessed over inanimate objects,—fill the air with sights and sounds?"

"Or impress our senses with the belief in them, we never having been *en rappo^rt* with the person acting on us? No. What is commonly called mesmerism could not do this; but there may be a power akin to mesmerism, and superior to it,—the power that in the old days was called Magic. That such a power may extend to all inanimate objects of matter, I do not say; but if so, it would not be against nature, only a rare power in nature, which might be given to constitutions with certain peculiarities, and cultivated by practice to an extraordinary degree. That such a power might extend over the dead,—that is, over certain thoughts and memories that the dead may still retain,—and compel, not that which ought properly to be called the SOUL, and which is far beyond human reach, but rather a phantom of what has been most earth-stained on earth, to make itself apparent to our senses,—is a very ancient though obsolete theory, upon which I will

hazard no opinion. But I do not conceive the power would be supernatural. Let me illustrate what I mean, from an experiment which Paracelsus¹ describes as not difficult, and which the author of the ‘Curiosities of Literature’² cites as credible : A flower perishes ; you burn it. Whatever were the elements of that flower while it lived are gone, dispersed, you know not whither ; you can never discover nor re-collect them. But you can, by chemistry, out of the burnt dust of that flower, raise a spectrum³ of the flower, just as it seemed in life. It may be the same with a human being. The soul has as much escaped you as the essence or elements of the flower. Still you may make a spectrum of it. And this phantom, though in the popular superstition it is held to be the soul of the departed, must not be confounded with the true soul ; it is but the eidolon⁴ of the dead form. Hence, like the best-attested stories of ghosts or spirits, the thing that most strikes us is the absence of what we hold to be soul, — that is, of superior, emancipated intelligence. They come for little or no object ; they seldom speak, if they do come ; they utter no

¹ 1493–1541. One of the last of those who dealt in alchemy and the mystic mock-sciences of the middle ages.

² Isaac Disraeli (1766–1848). An English writer, father of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield.

³ Not in the sense common in physics, but meaning an appearance that remains in sight when the eyes are shut.

⁴ The Greek word for appearance.

ideas above those of an ordinary person on earth. These American spirit-seers have published volumes of communications in prose and verse, which they assert to be given in the names of the most illustrious dead,—Shakespeare, Bacon, Heaven knows whom. Those communications, taking the best, are certainly of not a whit higher order than would be communications from living persons of fair talent and education ; they are wondrously inferior to what Bacon, Shakespeare, and Plato said and wrote when on earth. Nor, what is more notable, do they ever contain an idea that was not on the earth before. Wonderful, therefore, as such phenomena may be (granting them to be truthful), I see much that philosophy may question, nothing that it is incumbent on philosophy to deny, namely, nothing supernatural. They are but ideas conveyed somehow or other (we have not yet discovered the means) from one mortal brain to another. Whether in so doing tables walk of their own accord, or fiend-like shapes appear in a magic circle, or bodiless hands rise and remove material objects, or a thing of darkness, such as presented itself to me, freeze our blood,—still am I persuaded that these are but agencies conveyed, as by electric wires, to my own brain from the brain of another. In some constitutions there is a natural chemistry, and those may produce chemic wonders ; in others a natural fluid, call it electricity, and these produce

electric wonders. But they differ in this from normal science : they are alike objectless, purposeless, puerile, frivolous. They lead on to no grand results, and therefore the world does not heed, and true sages have not cultivated them. But sure I am, that of all I saw or heard, a man, human as myself, was the remote originator ; and, I believe, unconsciously to himself as to the exact effects produced, for this reason : no two persons, you say, have ever told you that they experienced exactly the same thing ; well, observe, no two persons ever experience exactly the same dream. If this were an ordinary imposture, the machinery would be arranged for results that would but little vary ; if it were a supernatural agency permitted by the Almighty, it would surely be for some definite end. These phenomena belong to neither class. My persuasion is, that they originate in some brain now far distant ; that that brain had no distinct volition in anything that occurred ; that what does occur reflects but its devious, motley, ever shifting, half-formed thoughts ; in short, that it has been but the dreams of such a brain put into action and invested with a semi-substance. That this brain is of immense power, that it can set matter into movement, that it is malignant and destructive, I believe. Some material force must have killed my dog ; it might, for aught I know, have sufficed to kill myself, had I been as subjugated by

terror as the dog,—had my intellect or my spirit given me no countervailing resistance in my will."

"It killed your dog ! that is fearful ! Indeed, it is strange that no animal can be induced to stay in that house ; not even a cat. Rats and mice are never found in it."

"The instincts of the brute creation detect influences deadly to their existence. Man's reason has a sense less subtle, because it has a resisting power more supreme. But enough ; do you comprehend my theory ? "

"Yes, though imperfectly ; and I accept any crotchet (pardon the word), however odd, rather than embrace at once the notion of ghosts and hobgoblins we imbibed in our nurseries. Still, to my unfortunate house the evil is the same. What on earth can I do with the house ? "

"I will tell you what I would do. I am convinced from my own internal feelings that the small unfurnished room, at right angles to the door of the bedroom which I occupied, forms a starting-point or receptacle for the influences which haunt the house ; and I strongly advise you to have the walls opened, the floor removed, nay, the whole room pulled down. I observe that it is detached from the body of the house, built over the small back yard, and could be removed without injury to the rest of the building."

"And you think if I did that — "

"You would cut off the telegraph-wires. Try

it. I am so persuaded that I am right, that I will pay half the expense, if you will allow me to direct the operations."

"Nay, I am well able to afford the cost; for the rest, allow me to write to you."

About ten days afterward I received a letter from Mr. J—, telling me that he had visited the house since I had seen him; that he had found the two letters I had described replaced in the drawer from which I had taken them; that he had read them with misgivings like my own; that he had instituted a cautious inquiry about the woman to whom I rightly conjectured they had been written. It seemed that thirty-six years ago (a year before the date of the letters) she had married, against the wish of her relatives, an American of very suspicious character; in fact, he was generally believed to have been a pirate. She herself was the daughter of very respectable tradespeople, and had served in the capacity of nursery governess before her marriage. She had a brother, a widower, who was considered wealthy, and who had one child about six years old. A month after the marriage, the body of this brother was found in the Thames, near London Bridge; there seemed some marks of violence about his throat, but they were not deemed sufficient to warrant the inquest in any other verdict than that of "found drowned."

The American and his wife took charge of the

little boy, the deceased brother having by his will left his sister the guardian of his only child, and in event of the child's death the sister inherited. The child died about six months afterward ; it was supposed to have been neglected and ill-treated. The neighbors deposed to have heard it shriek at night. The surgeon who had examined it after death said that it was emaciated as if from want of nourishment, and the body was covered with livid bruises. It seemed that one winter night the child had sought to escape ; had crept out into the back yard, tried to scale the wall, fallen back exhausted, and had been found at morning on the stones in a dying state. But though there was some evidence of cruelty, there was none of murder ; and the aunt and her husband had sought to palliate cruelty by alleging the exceeding stubbornness and perversity of the child, who was declared to be half-witted. Be that as it may, at the orphan's death the aunt inherited her brother's fortune. Before the first wedded year was out, the American quitted England abruptly, and never returned to it. He obtained a cruising vessel, which was lost in the Atlantic two years afterward. The widow was left in affluence ; but reverses of various kinds had befallen her ; a bank broke, an investment failed, she went into a small business and became insolvent, then she entered into service, sinking lower and lower, from housekeeper down to maid-of-all-work, never

long retaining a place, though nothing peculiar against her character was ever alleged. She was considered sober, honest, and peculiarly quiet in her ways; still nothing prospered with her. And so she had dropped into the workhouse, from which Mr. J—— had taken her, to be placed in charge of the very house which she had rented as mistress in the first year of her wedded life.

Mr. J—— added that he had passed an hour alone in the unfurnished room which I had urged him to destroy, and that his impressions of dread while there were so great, though he had neither heard nor seen anything, that he was eager to have the walls bared and the floors removed, as I had suggested. He had engaged persons for the work, and would commence any day I would name.

The day was accordingly fixed. I repaired to the haunted house; we went into the blind, dreary room, took up the skirting, and then the floors. Under the rafters, covered with rubbish, was found a trapdoor, quite large enough to admit a man. It was closely nailed down with clamps and rivets of iron. On removing these we descended into a room below, the existence of which had never been suspected. In this room there had been a window and a flue, but they had been bricked over, evidently for many years. By the help of candles we examined this place; it still retained some moldering furniture,—three chairs,

an oak settee, a table, — all of the fashion of about eighty years ago. There was a chest of drawers against the wall, in which we found, half rotted away, old-fashioned articles of a man's dress, such as might have been worn eighty or a hundred years ago, by a gentleman of some rank ; costly steel buckles and buttons, like those yet worn in court-dresses, a handsome court-sword ; in a waist-coat which had once been rich with gold lace, but which was now blackened and foul with damp, we found five guineas, a few silver coins, and an ivory ticket, probably for some place of entertainment long since passed away. But our main discovery was in a kind of iron safe fixed to the wall, the lock of which it cost us much trouble to get picked.

In this safe were three shelves and two small drawers. Ranged on the shelves were several small bottles of crystal, hermetically stopped. They contained colorless volatile essences, of what nature I shall say no more than that they were not poisons ; phosphor and ammonia entered into some of them. There were also some very curious glass tubes, and a small pointed rod of iron, with a large lump of rock-crystal, and another of amber, also a loadstone of great power.

In one of the drawers we found a miniature portrait set in gold, and retaining the freshness of its colors most remarkably, considering the length of time it had probably been there. The portrait was that of a man who might be some-

what advanced in middle life, perhaps forty-seven or forty-eight.

It was a most peculiar face, a most impressive face. If you could fancy some mighty serpent transformed into man, preserving in the human lineaments the old serpent type, you would have a better idea of that countenance than long descriptions can convey ; the width and flatness of frontal, the tapering elegance of contour, disguising the strength of the deadly jaw ; the long, large, terrible eye, glittering and green as the emerald, and withal a certain ruthless calm, as if from the consciousness of an immense power. The strange thing was this : the instant I saw the miniature I recognized a startling likeness to one of the rarest portraits in the world ; the portrait of a man of rank only below that of royalty, who in his own day had made a considerable noise. History says little or nothing of him ; but search the correspondence of his contemporaries, and you find reference to his wild daring, his bold profligacy, his restless spirit, his taste for the occult sciences. While still in the meridian of life he died and was buried, so say the chronicles, in a foreign land. He died in time to escape the grasp of the law ; for he was accused of crimes which would have given him to the headsman. After his death, the portraits of him, which had been numerous, for he had been a munificent encourager of art, were bought up and destroyed,

it was supposed by his heirs, who might have been glad could they have razed his very name from their splendid line. He had enjoyed vast wealth ; a large portion of this was believed to have been embezzled by a favorite astrologer or soothsayer ; at all events, it had unaccountably vanished at the time of his death. One portrait alone of him was supposed to have escaped the general destruction ; I had seen it in the house of a collector some months before. It had made on me a wonderful impression, as it does on all who behold it ; a face never to be forgotten ; and there was that face in the miniature that lay within my hand. True, that in the miniature the man was a few years older than in the portrait I had seen, or than the original was even at the time of his death. But a few years ! — why, between the date in which flourished that direful noble, and the date in which the miniature was evidently painted, there was an interval of more than two centuries. While I was thus gazing, silent and wondering, Mr. J — said, —

“ But is it possible ? I have known this man.”

“ How ? where ? ” cried I.

“ In India. He was high in the confidence of the Rajah of —, and wellnigh drew him into a revolt which would have lost the Rajah his dominions. The man was a Frenchman, his name De V — ; clever, bold, lawless. We insisted on his dismissal and banishment ; it must be the same

man, no two faces like his, yet this miniature seems nearly a hundred years old."

Mechanically I turned round the miniature to examine the back of it, and on the back was engraved a pentacle¹; in the middle of the pentacle a ladder, and the third step of the ladder was formed by the date 1765. Examining still more minutely, I detected a spring; this, on being pressed, opened the back of the miniature as a lid. Within-side the lid were engraved, "Mariana, to thee. Be faithful in life and in death to—." Here follows a name that I will not mention, but it was not unfamiliar to me. I had heard it spoken of by old men in my childhood as the name borne by a dazzling charlatan, who had made a great sensation in London for a year or so, and had fled the country on the charge of a double murder within his own house,—that of his mistress and his rival. I said nothing of this to Mr. J—, to whom reluctantly I resigned the miniature.

We had found no difficulty in opening the first drawer within the iron safe; we found great difficulty in opening the second: it was not locked, but it resisted all efforts, till we inserted in the chinks the edge of a chisel. When we had thus drawn it forth, we found a very singular apparatus, in the nicest order.² Upon a small, thin book, or rather

¹ A figure, supposed to be of magic power.

² Arranged with especial care.

tablet, was placed a saucer of crystal ; this saucer was filled with a clear liquid ; on that liquid floated a kind of compass, with a needle shifting rapidly round ; but instead of the usual points of a compass, were seven strange characters, not very unlike those used by astrologers to denote the planets. A very peculiar, but not strong nor displeasing odor came from this drawer, which was lined with a wood that we afterward discovered to be hazel. Whatever the cause of this odor, it produced a material effect on the nerves. We all felt it, even the two workmen who were in the room ; a creeping, tingling sensation, from the tips of the fingers to the roots of the hair. Impatient to examine the tablet, I removed the saucer. As I did so, the needle of the compass went round and round with exceeding swiftness, and I felt a shock that ran through my whole frame, so that I dropped the saucer on the floor. The liquid was spilt, the saucer was broken, the compass rolled to the end of the room, and at that instant the walls shook to and fro as if a giant had swayed and rocked them.

The two workmen were so frightened that they ran up the ladder by which we had descended from the trapdoor ; but, seeing that nothing more happened, they were easily induced to return.

Meanwhile, I had opened the tablet ; it was bound in plain red leather, with a silver clasp ; it contained but one sheet of thick vellum, and on

that sheet were inscribed, within a double pentacle, words in old monkish Latin, which are literally to be translated thus : " On all that it can reach within these walls, sentient or inanimate, living or dead, as moves the needle, so works my will ! Accursed be the house, and restless the dwellers therein."

We found no more. Mr. J—— burned the tablet and its anathema. He razed to the foundation the part of the building containing the secret room, with the chamber over it. He had then the courage to inhabit the house himself for a month, and a quieter, better conditioned house could not be found in all London. Subsequently he let it to advantage, and his tenant has made no complaints.

But my story is not yet done. A few days after Mr. J—— had removed into the house, I paid him a visit. We were standing by the open window and conversing. A van containing some articles of furniture which he was moving from his former house was at the door. I had just urged on him my theory, that all those phenomena regarded as supermundane had emanated from a human brain ; adducing the charm, or rather curse, we had found and destroyed, in support of my theory. Mr J—— was observing in reply, " that even if mesmerism, or whatever analogous power it might be called, could really thus work in the absence of the operator, and produce effects so extraordinary,

still could those effects continue when the operator himself was dead? and if the spell had been wrought, and, indeed, the room walled up, more than seventy years ago, the probability was, that the operator had long since departed this life,"—Mr. J——, I say, was thus answering, when I caught hold of his arm and pointed to the street below.

A well-dressed man had crossed from the opposite side, and was accosting the carrier in charge of the van. His face, as he stood, was exactly fronting our window. It was the face of the miniature we had discovered; it was the face of the portrait of the noble three centuries ago.

"Good heaven!" cried Mr. J——, "that is the face of De V——, and scarcely a day older than when I saw it in the Rajah's court in my youth!"

Seized by the same thought, we both hastened downstairs; I was first in the street, but the man had already gone. I caught sight of him, however, not many yards in advance, and in another moment I was by his side.

I had resolved to speak to him; but when I looked into his face, I felt as if it were impossible to do so. That eye—the eye of the serpent—fixed and held me spellbound. And withal, about the man's whole person there was a dignity, an air of pride and station and superiority, that would have made any one, habituated to the usages of the world, hesitate long before venturing upon

a liberty or impertinence. And what could I say? What was it I could ask? Thus ashamed of my first impulse, I fell a few paces back, still, however, following the stranger, undecided what else to do. Meanwhile, he turned the corner of the street; a plain carriage was in waiting with a servant out of livery, dressed like a *valet de place*,¹ at the carriage door. In another moment he had stepped into the carriage, and it drove off. I returned to the house. Mr. J—— was still at the street door. He had asked the carrier what the stranger had said to him.

“Merely asked whom that house now belonged to.”

The same evening I happened to go with a friend to a place in town called the Cosmopolitan Club, a place open to men of all countries, all opinions, all degrees. One orders one’s coffee, smokes one’s cigar. One is always sure to meet agreeable, sometimes remarkable persons.

I had not been two minutes in the room before I beheld at table, conversing with an acquaintance of mine, whom I will designate by the initial G——, the man, the original of the miniature. He was now without his hat, and the likeness was yet more startling, only I observed that while he was conversing, there was less severity in the countenance; there was even a smile, though a very quiet and very cold one. The dignity of

¹ Somebody to guide one about a town.

mien I had acknowledged in the street was also more striking ; a dignity akin to that which invests some prince of the East, conveying the idea of supreme indifference and habitual, indisputable, indolent, but resistless power.

G—— soon after left the stranger, who then took up a scientific journal, which seemed to absorb his attention.

I drew G—— aside. "Who and what is that gentleman ?"

"That ? Oh, a very remarkable man indeed ! I met him last year amidst the caves of Petra, the Scriptural Edom. He is the best Oriental scholar I know. We joined company, had an adventure with robbers, in which he showed a coolness that saved our lives ; afterward he invited me to spend a day with him in a house he had bought at Damascus, a house buried amongst almond-blossoms and roses ; the most beautiful thing ! He had lived there for some years, quite as an Oriental, in grand style. I half suspect he is a renegade, immensely rich, very odd ; by the bye, a great mesmerizer. I have seen him with my own eyes produce an effect on inanimate things. If you take a letter from your pocket and throw it to the other end of the room, he will order it to come to his feet, and you will see the letter wriggle itself along the floor till it has obeyed his command. 'Pon my honor 'tis true ; I have seen him affect even the weather : disperse or collect clouds, by means of a glass tube

or wand. But he does not like talking of these matters to strangers. He has only just arrived in England ; says he has not been here for a great many years ; let me introduce him to you."

"Certainly ! He is English, then ? What is his name ? "

"Oh ! a very homely one,—Richards."

"And what is his birth,—his family ? "

"How do I know ? What does it signify ? No doubt some *parvenu* ; but rich, so infernally rich !"

G——drew me up to the stranger, and the introduction was effected. The manners of Mr. Richards were not those of an adventurous traveler. Travelers are in general gifted with high animal spirits ; they are talkative, eager, imperious. Mr. Richards was calm and subdued in tone, with manners which were made distant by the loftiness of punctilious courtesy, the manners of a former age. I observed that the English he spoke was not exactly of our day. I should even have said that the accent was slightly foreign. But then Mr. Richards remarked that he had been little in the habit for many years of speaking in his native tongue. The conversation fell upon the changes in the aspect of London since he had last visited our metropolis. G——then glanced off to the moral changes,—literary, social, political,—the great men who were removed from the stage within the last twenty years ; the new great men who were coming on. In all this Mr. Richards evinced

no interest. He had evidently read none of our living authors, and seemed scarcely acquainted by name with our younger statesman. Once, and only once, he laughed ; it was when G—— asked him whether he had any thoughts of getting into Parliament. And the laugh was inward, sarcastic, sinister ; a sneer raised into a laugh. After a few minutes, G—— left us to talk to some other acquaintances who had just lounged into the room, and I then said, quietly,—

“I have seen a miniature of you, Mr. Richards, in the house you once inhabited, and perhaps built, — if not wholly, at least in part, — in Oxford Street. You passed by that house this morning.”

Not till I had finished did I raise my eyes to his, and then his fixed my gaze so steadfastly that I could not withdraw it, — those fascinating serpent-eyes. But involuntarily, and as if the words that translated my thought were dragged from me, I added in a low whisper, “I have been a student in the mysteries of life and nature ; of those mysteries I have known the occult professors. I have the right to speak to you thus.” And I uttered a certain password.

“Well, I concede the right. What would you ask ?”

“To what extent human will in certain temperaments can extend ?”

“To what extent can thought extend ? Think, and before you draw breath you are in China !”

"True ; but my thought has no power in China ! "

"Give it expression, and it may have. You may write down a thought which, sooner or later, may alter the whole condition of China. What is a law but a thought ? Therefore thought is infinite. Therefore thought has power ; not in proportion to its value,—a bad thought may make a bad law as potent as a good thought can make a good one."

"Yes ; what you say confirms my own theory. Through invisible currents one human brain may transmit its ideas to other human brains, with the same rapidity as a thought promulgated by visible means. And as thought is imperishable, as it leaves its stamp behind it in the natural world, even when the thinker has passed out of this world, so the thought of the living may have power to rouse up and revive the thoughts of the dead, such as those thoughts *were in life*, though the thought of the living cannot reach the thoughts which the dead *now* may entertain. Is it not so ?"

"I decline to answer, if in my judgment thought has the limit you would fix to it. But proceed ; you have a special question you wish to put."

"Intense malignity in an intense will, engendered in a peculiar temperament, and aided by natural means within the reach of science, may produce effects like those ascribed of old to evil magic. It might thus haunt the walls of a human habitation

with spectral revivals of all guilty thoughts and guilty deeds once conceived and done within those walls ; all, in short, with which the evil will claims *rapport*¹ and affinity,—imperfect, incoherent, fragmentary snatches at the old dramas acted therein years ago. Thoughts thus crossing each other hap-hazard, as in the nightmare of a vision, growing up into phantom sights and sounds, and all serving to create horror ; not because those sights and sounds are really visitations from a world without, but that they are ghastly, monstrous renewals of what have been in this world itself, set into malignant play by a malignant mortal. And it is through the material agency of that human brain that these things would acquire even a human power ; would strike as with the shock of electricity, and might kill, if the thought of the person assailed did not rise superior to the dignity of the original assailor ; might kill the most powerful animal, if unnerved by fear, but not injure the feeblest man, if, while his flesh crept, his mind stood out fearless. Thus when in old stories we read of a magician rent to pieces by the fiends he had invoked, or still more, in Eastern legends, that one magician succeeds by arts in destroying another, there may be so far truth, that a material being has clothed, from his own evil propensities, certain elements and fluids, usually quiescent or harmless, with awful shapes and terrific force ;

¹ Connection.

just as the lightning, that had lain hidden and innocent in the cloud, becomes by natural law suddenly visible, takes a distinct shape to the eye, and can strike destruction on the object to which it is attracted."

"You are not without glimpses of a mighty secret," said Mr. Richards, composedly. "According to your view, could a mortal obtain the power you speak of, he would necessarily be a malignant and evil being."

"If the power were exercised, as I have said, most malignant and most evil; though I believe in the ancient traditions, that he could not injure the good. His will could only injure those with whom it has established an affinity, or over whom it forces unresisted sway. I will now imagine an example that may be within the laws of nature, yet seem wild as the fables of a bewildered monk.

"You will remember that Albertus Magnus,¹ after describing minutely the process by which spirits may be invoked and commanded, adds emphatically, that the process will instruct and avail only to the few; that *a man must be born a magician!* that is, born with a peculiar physical temperament, as a man is born a poet. Rarely are men in whose constitution lurks this occult power of the highest order of intellect; usually in the intellect there is some twist, perversity, or disease. But, on the other hand, they must possess, to an

¹ 1193-1280. A mediæval scholar of immense range of learning.

astonishing degree, the faculty to concentrate thought on a single object,—the energetic faculty that we call WILL. Therefore, though their intellect be not sound, it is exceedingly forcible for the attainment of what it desires. I will imagine such a person pre-eminently gifted with this constitution and its concomitant forces. I will place him in the loftier grades of society. I will suppose his desires emphatically those of the sensualist ; he has, therefore, a strong love of life. He is an absolute egotist ; his will is concentered in himself ; he has fierce passions ; he knows no enduring, no holy affections, but he can covet eagerly what for the moment he desires ; he can hate implacably what opposes itself to his objects ; he can commit fearful crimes, yet feel small remorse ; he resorts rather to curses upon others, than to penitence for his misdeeds. Circumstances, to which his constitution guides him, lead him to a rare knowledge of the natural secrets which may serve his egotism. He is a close observer where his passions encourage observation ; he is a minute calculator, not from love of truth, but where love of self sharpens his faculties ; therefore he can be a man of science. I suppose such a being, having by experience learned the power of his arts over others, trying what may be the power of will over his own frame, and studying all that in natural philosophy may increase that power. He loves life, he dreads death ; *he wills to live on.* He can-

not restore himself to youth, he cannot entirely stay the progress of death, he cannot make himself immortal in the flesh and blood ; but he may arrest, for a time so long as to appear incredible if I said it, that hardening of the parts which constitutes old age. A year may age him no more than an hour ages another. His intense will, scientifically trained into system, operates, in short, over the wear and tear of his own frame. He lives on. That he may not seem a portent and a miracle, he *dies*, from time to time, seemingly, to certain persons. Having schemed the transfer of a wealth that suffices to his wants, he disappears from one corner of the world, and contrives that his obsequies shall be celebrated. He reappears at another corner of the world, where he resides undetected, and does not visit the scenes of his former career till all who could remember his features are no more. He would be profoundly miserable if he had affections ; he has none but for himself. No good man would accept his longevity ; and to no man, good or bad, would he or could he communicate its true secret. Such a man might exist ; such a man as I have described I see now before me, — Duke of —, in the court of —, dividing time between lust and brawl, alchemists and wizards ; again, in the last century, charlatan and criminal, with name less noble, domiciled in the house at which you gazed to-day, and flying from the law you had outraged, none knew whither ;

traveler once more revisiting London, with the same earthly passions which filled your heart when races now no more walked through yonder streets ; outlaw from the school of all the nobler and diviner mysteries. Execrable image of life in death and death in life, I warn you back from the cities and homes of healthful men ! back to the ruins of departed empires ! back to the deserts of nature unredeemed ! ”

There answered me a whisper so musical, so potently musical, that it seemed to enter into my whole being, and subdue me despite myself. Thus it said : —

“ I have sought one like you for the last hundred years. Now I have found you, we part not till I know what I desire. The vision that sees through the past and cleaves through the veil of the future is in you at this hour,—never before, never to come again. The vision of no puling, fantastic girl, of no sick-bed somnambule, but of a strong man with a vigorous brain. Soar, and look forth ! ”

As he spoke, I felt as if I rose out of myself upon eagle wings. All the weight seemed gone from air, roofless the room, roofless the dome of space. I was not in the body,—where, I knew not ; but aloft over time, over earth.

Again I heard the melodious whisper : “ You say right. I have mastered great secrets by the power of will. True, by will and by science I can

retard the process of years ; but death comes not by age alone. Can I frustrate the accidents which bring death upon the young ? ”

“ No, every accident is a providence. Before a providence, snaps every human will.”

“ Shall I die at last, ages and ages hence, by the slow, though inevitable, growth of time, or by the cause that I call accident ? ”

“ By a cause you call accident.”

“ Is not the end still remote ? ” asked the whisper, with a slight tremor.

“ Regarded as my life regards time, it is still remote.”

“ And shall I, before then, mix with the world of men as I did ere I learned these secrets ; resume eager interest in their strife and their trouble ; battle with ambition, and use the power of the sage to win the power that belongs to kings ? ”

“ You will yet play a part on the earth that will fill earth with commotion and amaze. For wondrous designs have you, a wonder yourself, been permitted to live on through the centuries. All the secrets you have stored will then have their uses ; all that now makes you a stranger amidst the generations will contribute then to make you their lord. As the trees and the straws are drawn into a whirlpool, as they spin round, are sucked to the deep, and again tossed aloft by the eddies, so shall races and thrones be drawn into your vortex.

Awful destroyer ! but in destroying, made, against your own will, a constructor."

" And that date, too, is far off ? "

" Far off ; when it comes, think your end in this world is at hand ! "

" How and what is the end ? Look east, west, south, and north."

" In the north, where you never yet trod, toward the point whence your instincts have warned you, there a specter will seize you. 'Tis Death ! I see a ship ! it is haunted ; 'tis chased ! it sails on. Baffled navies sail after that ship. It enters the region of ice. It passes a sky red with meteors. Two moons stand on high, over ice reefs. I see the ship locked between white defiles ; they are ice rocks. I see the dead strew the decks, stark and livid, green mold on their limbs. All are dead but one man, — it is you ! But years, though so slowly they come, have then scathed you. There is the coming of age on your brow, and the will is relaxed in the cells of the brain. Still that will, though enfeebled, exceeds all that man knew before you ; through the will you live on, gnawed with famine. And nature no longer obeys you in that death-spreading region ; the sky is a sky of iron, and the air has iron clamps, and the ice rocks wedge in the ship. Hark how it cracks and groans ! Ice will embed it as amber embeds a straw. And a man has gone forth, living yet, from the ship and its dead ; and he has clambered up the spikes of

an iceberg, and the two moons gaze down on his form. That man is yourself, and terror is on you, — terror ; and terror has swallowed up your will. And I see, swarming up the steep ice rock, gray, grizzly things. The bears of the North have scented their quarry ; they come near you and nearer, shambling, and rolling their bulk. And in that day every moment shall seem to you longer than the centuries through which you have passed. And heed this : after life, moments continued make the bliss or the hell of eternity."

"Hush," said the whisper. "But the day, you assure me, is far off, very far ! I go back to the almond and rose of Damascus ! Sleep !"

The room swam before my eyes. I became insensible. When I recovered, I found G—— holding my hand and smiling. He said, "You, who have always declared yourself proof against mesmerism, have succumbed at last to my friend Richards."

"Where is Mr. Richards ?"

"Gone, when you passed into a trance, saying quietly to me, 'Your friend will not wake for an hour.' "

I asked where Mr. Richards lodged.

"At the Trafalgar Hotel."

"Give me your arm," said I to G——. "Let us call on him ; I have something to say."

When we arrived at the hotel, we were told that Mr. Richards had returned twenty minutes

before, paid his bill, left directions with his servant (a Greek) to pack his effects, and proceed to Malta by the steamer from Southampton. Mr. Richards had merely said of his own movements, that he had visits to pay in the neighborhood of London, and it was uncertain whether he should be able to reach Southampton in time for that steamer ; if not, he should follow in the next one.

The waiter asked me my name. On my informing him, he gave me a note that Mr. Richards had left for me, in case I called.

The note was as follows : —

“ I wished you to utter what was in your mind. You obeyed. I have therefore established power over you. For three months from this day you can communicate to no living man what has passed between us. You cannot even show this note to the friend by your side. During three months, silence complete as to me and mine. Do you doubt my power to lay on you this command ? try to disobey me. At the end of the third month the spell is raised. For the rest, I spare you. I shall visit your grave a year and a day after it has received you.”

So ends this strange story, which I ask no one to believe. I write it down exactly three months after I received the above note. I could not write it before, nor could I show to G——, in spite of his urgent request, the note which I read under the gas-lamp by his side.

almost from their birth upward, they had dwelt together, Nello and Patrasche, in the little hut on the edge of the village, with the cathedral spire of Antwerp rising in the northeast, beyond the great green plain of seeding grass and spreading corn that stretched away from them like a tideless, changeless sea. It was the hut of a very old man, of a very poor man — of old Jehan Daas, who in his time had been a soldier, and who remembered the wars that had trampled the country as oxen tread down the furrows, and who had brought from his service nothing except a wound which had made him a cripple.

When old Jehan Daas had reached his full eighty, his daughter had died in the Ardennes, hard by Stavelot,¹ and had left him in legacy her two-year-old son. The old man could ill contrive to support himself, but he took up the additional burden uncomplainingly, and it soon became welcome and precious to him. Little Nello, which was but a pet diminutive for Nicolas, thrrove with him, and the old man and the little child lived in the poor little hut contentedly.

It was a very humble little mud hut indeed, but it was clean and white as a sea shell and stood in a small plot of garden ground that yielded beans and herbs and pumpkins. They were very poor, terribly poor ; many a day they had nothing at all

¹ In the northern part of the Ardennes, some little way from Antwerp.

to eat. They never by any chance had enough ; to have had enough to eat would have been to have reached paradise at once. But the old man was very gentle and good to the boy, and the boy was a beautiful, innocent, truthful, tender-natured creature ; and they were happy on a crust and a few leaves of cabbage, and asked no more of earth or Heaven — save, indeed, that Patrasche should be always with them, since without Patrasche where would they have been ?

For Patrasche was their alpha and omega¹ ; their treasury and granary ; their store of gold and wand of wealth ; their bread-winner and minister² ; their only friend and comforter. Patrasche dead or gone from them, they must have laid themselves down and died likewise. Patrasche was body, brains, hands, head, and feet to both of them ; Patrasche was their very life, their very soul. For Jehan Daas was old and a cripple, and Nello was but a child ; and Patrasche was their dog.

A dog of Flanders — yellow of hide, large of head and limb, with wolf-like ears that stood erect, and legs bowed and feet widened in the muscular development wrought in his breed by many generations of hard service. Patrasche came of a race which had toiled hard and cruelly from sire to son in Flanders many a century — slaves of slaves, dogs

¹ The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet (see Revelation i. 1, 8) : often used now as equivalent to "everything."

² Servant.

of the people, beasts of the shafts and the harness, creatures that lived straining their sinews in the gall of the cart, and died breaking their hearts on the flints of the streets.

Patrasche had been born of parents who had labored hard all their days over the sharp-set stones of the various cities, and the long, shadowless, weary roads of the two Flanders and of Brabant.¹ He had been born to no other heritage than those of pain and of toil. He had been fed on curses and baptized with blows. Why not? It was a Christian country, and Patrasche was but a dog. Before he was fully grown he had known the bitter gall of the cart and the collar. Before he had entered his thirteenth month he had become the property of a hardware dealer, who was accustomed to wander over the land north and south, from the blue sea to the green mountains. They sold him for a small price because he was so young.

This man was a drunkard and a brute. The life of Patrasche was a life of hell. To deal the tortures of hell on the animal creation is a way which the Christians have of showing their belief in it. His purchaser was a sullen, ill-living, brutal Brabantois, who heaped his cart full with pots and pans and flagons and buckets, and other wares of crockery and brass and tin, and left Patrasche to draw the load as best he might, while he himself

¹ To the west of Flanders.

lounged idly by the side in fat and sluggish ease, smoking his black pipe and stopping at every wine shop or café on the road.

Happily for Patrasche, or unhappily, he was very strong ; he came of an iron race, long born and bred to such cruel travail ; so that he did not die, but managed to drag on a wretched existence under the brutal burdens, the scarifying lashes, the hunger, the thirst, the blows, the curses, and the exhaustion, which are the only wages with which the Flemings repay the most patient and laborious of all their four-footed victims. One day, after two years of this long and deadly agony, Patrasche was going on as usual along one of the straight, dusty, unlovely roads that lead to the city of Rubens.¹ It was full midsummer, and very warm. His cart was very heavy, piled high with goods in metal and in earthenware. His owner sauntered on without noticing him otherwise than by the crack of the whip as it curled round his quivering loins. The Brabantois had paused to drink beer himself at every wayside house, but he had forbidden Patrasche to stop a moment for a draught from the canal.² Going along thus in the full sun, on a scorching highway, having eaten nothing for twenty-four hours, and, which was far worse to him, not having tasted water for nearly twelve,

¹ Rubens, the most famous of Flemish artists, lived the greater part of his life in Antwerp.

² The low part of Belgium, like Holland, has many canals.

being blind with dust, sore with blows, and stupefied with the merciless weight which dragged upon his loins, Patrasche, for once, staggered and foamed a little at the mouth, and fell.

He fell in the middle of the white, dusty road, in the full glare of the sun ; he was sick unto death, and motionless. His master gave him the only medicine in his pharmacy,—kicks and oaths, and blows with a cudgel of oak, which had been often the only food and drink, the only wage and reward, ever offered to him. But Patrasche was beyond the reach of any torture or of any curses. Patrasche lay, dead to all appearances, down in the white powder of the summer dust. After a while, finding it useless to assail his ribs with punishment and his ears with maledictions, the Brabantois—deeming life gone in him, or going, so nearly that his carcass was forever useless, unless, indeed, some one should strip it of the skin for gloves — cursed him fiercely in farewell, struck off the leathern bands of the harness, kicked his body heavily aside into the grass, and, groaning and muttering in savage wrath, pushed the cart lazily along the road uphill, and left the dying dog there for the ants to sting and for the crows to pick.

It was the last day before kermess,¹ away at Louvain,² and the Brabantois was in haste to

¹ The annual fair or festivity of a town.

² Louvain is a large town in Brabant and used to be its capital.

reach the fair and get a good place for his truck of brass wares. He was in fierce wrath, because Patrasche had been a strong and much-enduring animal, and because he himself had now the hard task of pushing his *charette*¹ all the way to Louvain. But to stay to look after Patrasche never entered his thoughts ; the beast was dying and useless, and he would steal, to replace him, the first large dog that he found wandering alone out of sight of its master. Patrasche had cost him nothing, or next to nothing, and for two long, cruel years he had made him toil ceaselessly in his service, from sunrise to sunset, through summer and winter, in fair weather and foul.

He had got a fair use and a good profit out of Patrasche ; being human, he was wise, and left the dog to draw his last breath alone in the ditch, and have his bloodshot eyes plucked out as they might be by the birds, while he himself went on his way to beg and to steal, to eat and to drink, to dance and to sing in the mirth at Louvain. A dying dog, a dog of the cart—why should he waste hours over its agonies at peril of losing a handful of copper coins, at peril of a shout of laughter ?

Patrasche lay there, flung in the grass-green ditch. It was a busy road that day, and hundreds of people, on foot and on mules, in wagons or in carts, went by, tramping quickly and joyously

¹ A sort of cart.

on to Louvain. Some saw him ; most did not even look ; all passed on. A dead dog more or less—it was nothing in Brabant ; it would be nothing anywhere in the world.

After a time, among the holiday-makers, there came a little old man who was bent and lame and very feeble. He was in no guise for feasting ; he was very poorly and miserably clad, and he dragged his silent way slowly through the dust among the pleasure-seekers. He looked at Patrasche, paused, wondered, turned aside, then kneeled down in the rank grass and weeds of the ditch, and surveyed the dog with kindly eyes of pity. There was with him a little rosy, fair-haired, dark-eyed child of a few years old, who pattered in amid the bushes, that were for him breast-high, and stood gazing with a pretty seriousness upon the poor great, quiet beast.

Thus it was that these two first met — the little Nello and the big Patrasche.

The upshot of that day was that old Jehan Daas, with much laborious effort, drew the sufferer homeward to his own little hut, which was a stone's throw off, amid the fields ; and there tended him with so much care that the sickness, which had been a brain-seizure brought on by heat and thirst and exhaustion, with time and shade and rest passed away, and health and strength returned, and Patrasche staggered up again upon his four stout, tawny legs.

Now for many weeks he had been useless, powerless, sore, near to death ; but all this time he had heard no rough word, had felt no harsh touch, but only the pitying murmurs of the little child's voice and the soothing caress of the old man's hand.

In his sickness they two had grown to care for him, this lonely old man and the little happy child. He had a corner of the hut, with a heap of dry grass for his bed ; and they had learned to listen eagerly for his breathing in the dark night to tell them that he lived ; and when he first was well enough to essay a loud, hollow, broken bay, they laughed aloud, and almost wept together for joy at such a sign of his sure restoration ; and little Nello, in delighted glee, hung round his ragged neck chains of marguerites,¹ and kissed him with fresh and ruddy lips.

So then, when Patrasche arose, himself again, strong, big, gaunt, powerful, his great wistful eyes had a gentle astonishment in them that there were no curses to rouse him and no blows to drive him ; and his heart awakened to a mighty love, which never wavered once in its fidelity while life abode with him.

But Patrasche, being a dog, was grateful. Patrasche lay pondering long, with grave, tender, musing brown eyes watching the movements of his friends.

Now the old soldier, Jehan Daas, could do

¹ Daisies.

nothing for his living but limp about a little with a small cart, with which he carried daily the milk cans of those happier neighbors who owned cattle away into the town of Antwerp. The villagers gave him the employment a little out of charity; more because it suited them well to send their milk into the town by so honest a carrier, and bide at home themselves to look after their gardens, their cows, their poultry, or their little fields. But it was becoming hard work for the old man. He was eighty-three, and Antwerp was a good league¹ off, or more.

Patrasche watched the milk cans come and go that one day when he had got well and was lying in the sun with the wreath of marguerites round his tawny neck.

The next morning Patrasche, before the old man had touched the cart, arose and walked to it, and placed himself betwixt its handles, and testified as plainly as dumb show could do his desire and his ability to work in return for the bread of charity that he had eaten. Jehan Daas resisted long, for the old man was one of those who thought it a foul shame to bind dogs to labor for which Nature never formed them. But Patrasche would not be gainsaid; finding they did not harness him, he tried to draw the cart onward with his teeth.

At length Jehan Daas gave way, vanquished

¹ A league is about three miles.

by the persistence and the gratitude of this creature whom he had succored. He fashioned his cart so that Patrasche could run in it, and this he did every morning of his life thenceforward.

When the winter came Jehan Daas thanked the blessed fortune that had brought him to the dying dog in the ditch that fair day of Louvain ; for he was very old, and he grew feebler with each year, and he would ill have known how to pull his load of milk cans over the snows and through the deep ruts in the mud if it had not been for the strength and the industry of the animal he had befriended. As for Patrasche, it seemed heaven to him. After the frightful burdens that his old master had compelled him to strain under, at the call of the whip at every step, it seemed nothing to him but amusement to step out with this little light, green cart, with its bright brass cans, by the side of the gentle old man, who always paid him with a tender caress and with a kindly word. Besides, his work was over by three or four in the day, and after that time he was free to do as he would — to stretch himself, to sleep in the sun, to wander in the fields, to romp with the young child, or to play with his fellow-dogs. Patrasche was very happy.

Fortunately for his peace, his former owner was killed in a drunken brawl at the kermess of Mechlin,¹ and so sought not after him

¹ Between Antwerp and Louvain.

nor disturbed him in his new and well-loved home.

A few years later old Jehan Daas, who had always been a cripple, became so paralyzed with rheumatism that it was impossible for him to go out with the cart any more. Then little Nello, being now grown to his sixth year of age, and knowing the town well from having accompanied his grandfather so many times, took his place beside the cart, and sold the milk and received the coins in exchange, and brought them back to their respective owners with a pretty grace and seriousness which charmed all who beheld him.

The little Ardennois was a beautiful child, with dark, grave, tender eyes, and a lovely bloom upon his face, and fair locks that clustered to his throat ; and many an artist sketched the group as it went by him — the green cart with the brass flagons of Teniers and Mieris and Van Tal,¹ and the great, tawny-colored, massive dog, with his belled harness that chimed cheerily as he went, and the small figure that ran beside him, which had little white feet in great wooden shoes, and a soft, grave, innocent, happy face, like the little fair children of Rubens.

Nello and Patrasche did the work so well and so joyfully together that Jehan Daas himself, when

¹ These are Flemish and Dutch painters, whose favorite subjects were scenes of popular life. They worked two or three hundred years ago, but Ouida mentions them to show that these brass cans were old traditional things.

the summer came and he was better again, had no need to stir out, but could sit in the doorway in the sun and see them go forth through the garden wicket, and then doze and dream and pray a little, and then awake again as the clock tolled three and watch for their return. And on their return Patrasche would shake himself free of his harness with a bay of glee, and Nello would recount with pride the doings of the day ; and they would all go in together to their meal of rye bread and milk or soup, and would see the shadows lengthen over the great plain, and see the twilight veil the fair cathedral spire ; and then lie down together to sleep peacefully, while the old man said a prayer.

So the days and the years went on, and the lives of Nello and Patrasche were happy, innocent, and healthful.

In the spring and summer especially were they glad. Flanders is not a lovely land, and around the burg of Rubens it is perhaps least lovely of all. Corn and colza, pasture and plow, succeed each other on the characterless plain in wearying repetition, and, save by some gaunt gray tower, with its peal of pathetic bells, or some figure coming athwart the fields, made picturesque by a gleaner's bundle or a woodman's fagot, there is no change, no variety, no beauty anywhere ; and he who has dwelt upon the mountains or amid the forests feels oppressed as by imprisonment with the tedium and the endlessness of that vast

and dreary level. But it is green and very fertile, and it has wide horizons that have a certain charm of their own even in their dullness and monotony ; and among the rushes by the water side the flowers grow, and the trees rise tall and fresh where the barges glide, with their great hulks black against the sun, and their little green barrels and varicolored flags gay against the leaves. Anyway, there is greenery and breadth of space enough to be as good as beauty to a child and a dog ; and these two asked no better, when their work was done, than to lie buried in the lush grasses on the side of the canal, and watch the cumbrous vessels drifting by and bringing the crisp salt smell of the sea among the blossoming scents of the country summer.

True, in the winter it was harder, and they had to rise in the darkness and the bitter cold, and they had seldom as much as they could have eaten any day ; and the hut was scarce better than a shed when the nights were cold, although it looked so pretty in warm weather, buried in a great kindly clambering vine, that never bore fruit, indeed, but which covered it with luxuriant green tracery all through the months of blossom and harvest. In winter the winds found many holes in the walls of the poor little hut, and the vine was black and leafless, and the bare lands looked very bleak and drear without, and sometimes within the floor was flooded and then frozen. In winter it was hard ;

and the snow numbed the little white limbs of Nello, and the icicles cut the brave, untiring feet of Patrasche.

But even then they were never heard to lament, either of them. The child's wooden shoes and the dog's four legs would trot manfully together over the frozen fields to the chime of the bells on the harness ; and then sometimes, in the streets of Antwerp, some housewife would bring them a bowl of soup and a handful of bread, or some kindly trader would throw some billets of fuel into the little cart as it went homeward, or some woman in their own village would bid them keep some share of the milk they carried for their own food ; and then they would run over the white lands, through the early darkness, bright and happy, and burst with a shout of joy into their home.

So, on the whole, it was well with them — very well ; and Patrasche, meeting on the highway or in the public streets the many dogs who toiled from daybreak into nightfall, paid only with blows and curses, and loosened from the shafts with a kick to starve and freeze as best they might — Patrasche in his heart was very grateful to his fate, and thought it the fairest and the kindest the world could hold. Though he was often very hungry indeed when he lay down at night ; though he had to work in the heats of summer noons and the rasping chills of winter dawns ; though his

feet were often tender with wounds from the sharp edges of the jagged pavement ; though he had to perform tasks beyond his strength and against his nature — yet he was grateful and content ; he did his duty with each day, and the eyes that he loved smiled down on him. It was sufficient for Patrasche.

There was only one thing which caused Patrasche any uneasiness in his life, and it was this. Antwerp, as all the world knows, is full at every turn of old piles¹ of stones, dark and ancient and majestic, standing in crooked courts, jammed against gateways and taverns, rising by the water's edge, with bells ringing above them in the air, and ever and again out of their arched doors a swell of music pealing. There they remain, the grand old sanctuaries of the past, shut in amid the squalor, the hurry, the crowds, the unloveliness, and the commerce of the modern world ; and all day long the clouds drift and the birds circle and the winds sigh around them, and beneath the earth at their feet there sleeps — RUBENS.

And the greatness of the mighty master still rests upon Antwerp, and wherever we turn in its narrow streets his glory lies therein, so that all mean things are thereby transfigured ; and as we pace slowly through the winding ways, and by the edge of the stagnant water, and through the noisome courts, his spirit abides with us, and the

¹ Buildings, in this case great churches.

heroic beauty of his visions is about us, and the stones that once felt his footsteps and bore his shadow seem to arise and speak of him with living voices. For the city which is the tomb of Rubens still lives to us through him, and him alone.

It is so quiet there by that great white sepulcher — so quiet, save only when the organ peals and the choir cries aloud the *Salve Regina* or the *Kyrie eleison*.¹ Sure no artist ever had a greater gravestone than that pure marble sanctuary gives to him in the heart of his birthplace in the chancel of St. Jacques.²

Without Rubens, what were Antwerp? A dirty, dusky, bustling mart, which no man would ever care to look upon save the traders who do business on its wharves. With Rubens, to the whole world of men it is a sacred name, a sacred soil, a Bethlehem where a god of art saw light, a Golgotha where a god of art lies dead.

O nations! closely should you treasure your great men; for by them alone will the future know of you. Flanders in her generations has been wise. In his life she glorified this greatest of her sons, and in his death she magnifies his name. But her wisdom is very rare.

Now the trouble of Patrasche was this. Into these great, sad piles of stones, that reared their

¹ Parts of the Church service.

² The Cathedral of Antwerp.

melancholy majesty above the crowded roofs, the child Nello would many and many a time enter, and disappear through their dark, arched portals, while Patrasche, left without upon the pavement, would wearily and vainly ponder on what could be the charm which thus allured from him his inseparable and beloved companion. Once or twice he did essay to see for himself, clattering up the steps with his milk cart behind him ; but thereon he had been always sent back again summarily by a tall custodian in black clothes and silver chains of office ; and, fearful of bringing his little master into trouble, he desisted, and remained couched patiently before the churches until such time as the boy reappeared. It was not the fact of his going into them which disturbed Patrasche ; he knew that people went to church ; all the village went to the small, tumble-down, gray pile opposite the red windmill. What troubled him was that little Nello always looked strangely when he came out, always very flushed or very pale ; and whenever he returned home after such visitations would sit silent and dreaming, not caring to play, but gazing out at the evening skies beyond the line of the canal, very subdued and almost sad.

What was it ? wondered Patrasche. He thought it could not be good or natural for the little lad to be so grave, and in his dumb fashion he tried all he could to keep Nello by him in the sunny fields or in the busy market place. But to the churches

Nello would go ; most often of all would he go to the great cathedral ; and Patrasche, left without on the stones by the iron fragments of Quentin Matsys's¹ gate, would stretch himself and yawn and sigh, and even howl now and then, all in vain, until the doors closed and the child perforce came forth again, and, winding his arms about the dog's neck, would kiss him on his broad, tawny-colored forehead, and murmur always the same words, "If I could only see them, Patrasche ! — if I could only see them ! "

What were they ? pondered Patrasche, looking up with large, wistful, sympathetic eyes.

One day, when the custodian was out of the way and the doors left ajar, he got in for a moment after his little friend and saw. "They" were two great, covered pictures on either side of the choir.

Nello was kneeling, rapt as in an ecstasy, before the altar-picture of the Assumption² ; and when he noticed Patrasche, and rose and drew the dog gently out into the air, his face was wet with tears, and he looked up at the veiled places as he passed them, and murmured to his companion, "It is so terrible not to see them, Patrasche, just because one is poor and cannot pay ! He never meant that the poor should not see them when he painted them, I am sure. He would have had us see them

¹ An early Flemish artist.

² The Cathedral of Antwerp has three great pictures by Rubens. The Assumption is over the altar : the two others are mentioned on the next page.

any day, every day ; that I am sure. And they keep them shrouded there — shrouded in the dark, the beautiful things ! And they never feel the light, and no eyes look on them, unless rich people come and pay. If I could only see them, I would be content to die."

But he could not see them, and Patrasche could not help him, for to gain the silver piece that the church exacts as the price for looking on the glories of the "Elevation of the Cross" and the "Descent of the Cross" was a thing as utterly beyond the powers of either of them as it would have been to scale the heights of the cathedral spire. They had never so much as a sou to spare ; if they cleared enough to get a little wood for the stove, a little broth for the pot, it was the utmost they could do. And yet the heart of the child was set in sore and endless longing upon beholding the greatness of the two veiled Rubens.¹

The whole soul of the little Ardennois thrilled and stirred with an absorbing passion for art. Going on his ways through the old city in the early days before the sun or the people had risen, Nello, who looked only a little peasant boy, with a great dog drawing milk to sell from door to door, was in a heaven of dreams whereof Rubens was the god. Nello, cold and hungry, with stockingless feet in wooden shoes, and the winter winds blow-

¹ The two great pictures mentioned are covered by screens and displayed on payment of a small fee.

ing among his curls and lifting his poor thin garments, was in a rapture of meditation, wherein all that he saw was the beautiful fair face of the Mary of the Assumption, with the waves of her golden hair lying upon her shoulders, and the light of an eternal sun shining down upon her brow. Nello, reared in poverty, and buffeted by fortune, and untaught in letters, and unheeded by men, had the compensation or the curse which is called genius.

No one knew it ; he as little as any. No one knew it. Only, indeed, Patrasche, who, being with him always, saw him draw with chalk upon the stones any and every thing that grew or breathed ; heard him on his little bed of hay murmur all manner of timid, pathetic prayers to the spirit of the great master ; watched his gaze darken and his face radiate at the evening glow of sunset or the rosy rising of the dawn ; and felt many and many a time the tears of a strange, nameless pain and joy, mingled together, fall hotly from the bright young eyes upon his own wrinkled, yellow forehead.

“ I should go to my grave quite content if I thought, Nello, that when thou growest a man thou couldst own this hut and the little plot of ground, and labor for thyself, and be called Baas by thy neighbors,” said the old man Jehan many an hour from his bed. For to own a bit of soil, and to be called Baas (master) by the hamlet

round, is to have achieved the highest ideal of a Flemish peasant ; and the old soldier, who had wandered over all the earth in his youth, and had brought nothing back, deemed in his old age that to live and die on one spot in contented humility was the fairest fate he could desire for his darling. But Nello said nothing.

The same leaven was working in him that in other times begat Rubens and Jordæns and the Van Eycks,¹ and all their wondrous tribe, and in times more recent began in the green country of the Ardennes, where the Meuse washes the old walls of Dijon, the great artist of the Patroclus, whose genius is too near us for us aright to measure its divinity.²

Nello dreamed of other things in the future than of tilling the little rood of earth and living under the wattle roof, and being called Baas by neighbors a little poorer or a little less poor than himself. The cathedral spire, where it rose beyond the fields in the ruddy evening skies, or in the dim, gray, misty mornings, said other things to him than this. But these he told only to Patrasche, whispering, childlike, his fancies in the dog's ear when they went together at their work through the fogs of the daybreak, or lay together at their

¹ The Van Eycks were among the early Flemish painters. Jordæns was of about the same time as Rubens.

² Antoine Joseph Wiertz, a Belgian historical painter. His works are collected in a celebrated gallery in Brussels. One of them is the "Struggle on the Death of Patroclus."

rest among the rustling rushes by the water's side.

For such dreams are not easily shaped into speech to awake the slow sympathies of human auditors ; and they would only have sorely perplexed and troubled the poor old man bedridden in his corner, who, for his part, whenever he had trodden the streets of Antwerp, had thought the daub of blue and red that they called a Madonna, on the walls of the wine shop where he drank his sou's worth of black beer, quite as good as any of the famous altarpieces for which the stranger folk traveled far and wide into Flanders from every land on which the good sun shone.

There was only one other besides Patrasche to whom Nello could talk at all of his daring fantasies. This other was little Alois, who lived at the old red mill on the grassy mound, and whose father, the miller, was the best-to-do husbandman in all the village. Little Alois was only a pretty baby with soft, round, rosy features, made lovely by those sweet dark eyes that the Spanish rule has left in so many a Flemish face in testimony of the Alvan dominion, as Spanish art has left broad-sown throughout the country majestic palaces and stately courts, gilded house fronts and sculptured lintels — histories in blazonry and poems in stone.

Little Alois was often with Nello and Patrasche. They played in the fields, they ran in the snow, they gathered the daisies and bilberries, they went

up to the old gray church together, and they often sat together by the broad wood fire in the mill-house. Little Alois, indeed, was the richest child in the hamlet. She had neither brother nor sister ; her blue serge dress had never a hole in it ; at kermess she had as many gilded nuts and Agni Dei in sugar as her hands could hold ; and when she went up for her first communion her flaxen curls were covered with a cap of richest Mechlin lace, which had been her mother's and her grandmother's before it came to her. Men spoke already, though she had but twelve years, of the good wife she would be for their sons to woo and win ; but she herself was a little gay, simple child, in no wise conscious of her heritage, and she loved no playfellows so well as Jehan Daas's grandson and his dog.

One day her father, Baas Cogez, a good man, but somewhat stern, came on a pretty group in the long meadow behind the mill, where the aftermath had that day been cut. It was his little daughter sitting amid the hay, with the great, tawny head of Patrasche on her lap, and many wreaths of poppies and blue cornflowers round them both ; on a clean, smooth slab of pine wood the boy Nello drew their likeness with a stick of charcoal.

The miller stood and looked at the portrait with tears in his eyes—it was so strangely like, and he loved his only child closely and well. Then he roughly chid the little girl for idling there while

her mother needed her within, and sent her indoors crying and afraid ; then, turning, he snatched the wood from Nello's hands. "Dost do much of such folly ?" he asked, but there was a tremble in his voice.

Nello colored and hung his head. "I draw everything I see," he murmured.

The miller was silent ; then he stretched his hand out with a franc in it. "It is folly, as I say, and evil waste of time ; nevertheless it is like Alois, and will please the house-mother. Take this silver bit for it and leave it for me."

The color died out of the face of the young Ardennois ; he lifted his head and put his hands behind his back. "Keep your money and the portrait both, Baas Cogez," he said simply. "You have been often good to me." Then he called Patrasche to him, and walked away across the fields.

"I could have seen them with that franc," he murmured to Patrasche ; "but I could not sell her picture — not even for them."

Baas Cogez went into his mill house sore troubled in his mind. "That lad must not be so much with Alois," he said to his wife that night. "Trouble may come of it hereafter ; he is fifteen now, and she is twelve, and the boy is comely of face and form."

"And he is a good lad and a loyal," said the housewife, feasting her eyes on the piece of pine

wood where it was throned above the chimney with a cuckoo clock in oak and a Calvary in wax.¹

"Yea, I do not gainsay that," said the miller, draining his pewter flagon.

"Then, if what you think of were ever to come to pass," said the wife, hesitatingly, "would it matter so much? She will have enough for both, and one cannot be better than happy."

"You are a woman, and therefore a fool," said the miller, harshly, striking his pipe on the table. "The lad is naught but a beggar, and, with these painter's fancies, worse than a beggar. Have a care that they are not together in the future, or I will send the child to the surer keeping of the nuns of the Sacred Heart."

The poor mother was terrified, and promised humbly to do his will. Not that she could bring herself altogether to separate the child from her favorite playmate, nor did the miller even desire that extreme of cruelty to a young lad who was guilty of nothing except poverty. But there were many ways in which little Alois was kept away from her chosen companion; and Nello, being a boy proud and quiet and sensitive, was quickly wounded, and ceased to turn his own steps and those of Patrasche, as he had been used to do with every moment of leisure, to the old red mill upon

¹ These represent the ideas on art of their possessors. A Calvary is a certain kind of representation of the scene of the Crucifixion.

the slope. What his offense was he did not know ; he supposed he had in some manner angered Baas Cogez by taking the portrait of Alois in the meadow ; and when the child who loved him would run to him and nestle her hand in his, he would smile at her very sadly, and say, with a tender concern for her before himself, "Nay, Alois, do not anger your father. He thinks that I make you idle, dear, and he is not pleased that you should be with me. He is a good man and loves you well ; we will not anger him, Alois."

But it was with a sad heart that he said it, and the earth did not look so bright to him as it had used to do when he went out at sunrise under the poplars down the straight roads with Patrasche. The old red mill had been a landmark to him, and he had been used to pause by it, going and coming, for a cheery greeting with its people, as her little flaxen head rose above the low mill wicket, and her little rosy hands had held out a bone or a crust to Patrasche. Now the dog looked wistfully at a closed door, and the boy went on without pausing, with a pang at his heart, and the child sat within with tears dropping slowly on the knitting to which she was set on her little stool by the stove ; and Baas Cogez, working among his sacks and his mill-gear, would harden his will and say to himself, "It is best so. The lad is all but a beggar, and full of idle, dreaming fooleries. Who knows what mischief might not come of it in the

future?" So he was wise in his generation, and would not have the door unbarred, except upon rare and formal occasions, which seemed to have neither warmth nor mirth in them to the two children, who had been accustomed so long to a daily gleeful, careless, happy interchange of greeting, speech, and pastime, with no other watcher of their sports or auditor of their fancies than Patrasche, sagely shaking the brazen bells of his collar and responding with all a dog's swift sympathies to their every change of mood.

All this while the little panel of pine wood remained over the chimney in the mill kitchen with the cuckoo clock and the waxen Calvary; and sometimes it seemed to Nello a little hard that, while his gift was accepted, he himself should be denied.

But he did not complain; it was his habit to be quiet. Old Jehan Daas had said ever to him, "We are poor; we must take what God sends—the ill with the good; the poor cannot choose."

To which the boy had always listened in silence, being reverent of his old grandfather; but nevertheless a certain vague, sweet hope, such as beguiles the children of genius, had whispered in his heart, "Yet the poor do choose sometimes—choose to be great, so that men cannot say them nay." And he thought so still in his innocence; and one day, when the little Alois, finding him by chance alone among the cornfields by the canal,

ran to him and held him close, and sobbed pitifully because the morrow would be her saint's day,¹ and for the first time in all her life her parents had failed to bid him to the little supper and romp in the great barns with which her feast-day was always celebrated, Nello had kissed her, and murmured to her in firm faith, "It shall be different one day, Alois. One day that little bit of pine wood that your father has of mine shall be worth its weight in silver ; and he will not shut the door against me then. Only love me always, dear little Alois ; only love me always, and I will be great."

"And if I do not love you ?" the pretty child asked, pouting a little through her tears, and moved by the instinctive coquettices of her sex.

Nello's eyes left her face and wandered to the distance, where, in the red and gold of the Flemish night, the cathedral spire rose. There was a smile on his face so sweet and yet so sad that little Alois was awed by it. "I will be great still," he said under his breath — "great still, or die, Alois."

"You do not love me," said the little spoiled child, pushing him away ; but the boy shook his head and smiled, and went on his way through the tall yellow corn, seeing as in a vision some day in a fair future when he should come into that old familiar land, and ask Alois of her people, and be

¹ The day of the saint after whom she was named.

not refused or denied, but received in honor ; while the village folk should throng to look upon him, and say in one another's ears, "Dost see him ? He is a king among men ; for he is a great artist, and the world speaks his name ; and yet he was only our poor little Nello, who was a beggar, as one may say, and only got his bread by the help of his dog." And he thought how he would fold his grandsire in furs and purples, and portray him as the old man is portrayed in the Family¹ in the chapel of St. Jacques ; and of how he would hang the throat of Patrasche with a collar of gold, and place him on his right hand, and say to the people, "This was once my only friend ; " and of how he would build himself a great white marble palace, and make to himself luxuriant gardens of pleasure, on the slope looking outward to where the cathedral spire rose ; and not dwell in it himself, but summon to it, as to a home, all men young and poor and friendless, but of the will to do mighty things ; and of how he would say to them always, if they sought to bless his name, "Nay ; do not thank me — thank Rubens. Without him, what should I have been ?" And these dreams — beautiful, impossible, innocent, free of all selfishness, full of heroical worship — were so closely about him as he went that he was happy — happy even on this sad anniversary of Alois's saint's day, when he and

¹ A picture of the Holy Family.

Patrasche went home by themselves to the little dark hut and the meal of black bread, while in the mill house all the children of the village sang and laughed, and ate the big round cakes of Dijon and the almond gingerbread of Brabant, and danced in the great barn to the light of the stars and the music of flute and fiddle.

“Never mind, Patrasche,” he said, with his arms round the dog’s neck, as they both sat in the door of the hut, where the sounds of the mirth at the mill came down to them on the night air ; “never mind. It shall all be changed by and by.”

He believed in the future ; Patrasche, of more experience and of more philosophy, thought that the loss of the mill supper in the present was ill compensated by dreams of milk and honey in some vague hereafter. And Patrasche growled whenever he passed by Baas Cogez.

“This is Alois’s name-day, is it not ?” said the old man Daas that night, from the corner where he was stretched upon his bed of sacking.

The boy gave a gesture of assent ; he wished that the old man’s memory had erred a little, instead of keeping such sure account.

“And why art not there ?” his grandfather pursued. “Thou hast never missed a year before, Nello.”

“Thou art too sick to leave,” murmured the lad, bending his handsome young head over the bed.

“Tut ! tut ! Mother Nulette would have come

and sat with me, as she does scores of times. What is the cause, Nello ? ” the old man persisted. “ Thou surely hast not had ill words with the little one ? ”

“ Nay, grandfather, never,” said the boy, quickly, with a hot color in his bent face. “ Simply and truly, Baas Cogez did not have me asked this year. He has taken some whim against me.”

“ But thou hast done nothing wrong ? ”

“ That I know of — nothing. I took the portrait of Alois on a piece of pine ; that is all.”

“ Ah ! ” The old man was silent ; the truth suggested itself to him with the boy’s innocent answer. He was tied to a bed of dried leaves in the corner of a wattle hut, but he had not wholly forgotten what the ways of the world were like.

He drew Nello’s fair head fondly to his breast with a tender gesture. “ Thou art very poor, my child,” he said, with a quiver the more in his aged, trembling voice ; “ so poor ! It is very hard for thee.”

“ Nay ; I am rich,” murmured Nello ; and in his innocence he thought so ; rich with the imperishable powers that are mightier than the might of kings. And he went and stood by the door of the hut in the quiet autumn night, and watched the stars troop by and the tall poplars bend and shiver in the wind. All the casements of the mill house were lighted, and every now and then the notes of the flute came to him. The tears fell

down his cheeks, for he was but a child ; yet he smiled, for he said to himself, "In the future ?" He stayed there until all was quite still and dark ; then he and Patrasche went within and slept together, long and deeply, side by side.

Now he had a secret which only Patrasche knew. There was a little outhouse to the hut which no one entered but himself — a dreary place, but with abundant clear light from the north. Here he had fashioned himself rudely an easel in rough lumber, and here, on a great gray sea of stretched paper, he had given shape to one of the innumerable fancies which possessed his brain. No one had ever taught him anything ; colors he had no means to buy; he had gone without bread many a time to procure even the few rude vehicles that he had here ; and it was only in black or white that he could fashion the things he saw. This great figure which he had drawn here in chalk was only an old man sitting on a fallen tree — only that. He had seen old Michel, the woodman, sitting so at evening many a time. He had never had a soul to tell him of outline or perspective, of anatomy or of shadow ; and yet he had given all the weary, worn-out age, all the sad, quiet patience, all the rugged, care-worn pathos of his original, and given them so that the old lonely figure was a poem, sitting there meditative and alone on the dead tree, with the darkness of the descending night behind him.

It was rude, of course, in a way, and had many

faults, no doubt ; and yet it was real, true in nature, true in art, and very mournful, and in a manner beautiful.

Patrasche had lain quiet countless hours watching its gradual creation after the labor of each day was done, and he knew that Nello had a hope — vain and wild perhaps, but strongly cherished — of sending this great drawing to compete for a prize of two hundred francs a year which it was announced in Antwerp would be open to every lad of talent, scholar or peasant, under eighteen who would attempt to win it with some unaided work of chalk or pencil. Three of the foremost artists in the town of Rubens were to be the judges and elect the victor according to his merits.

All the spring and summer and autumn Nello had been at work upon this treasure, which if triumphant would build him his first step toward independence and the mysteries of the art which he blindly, ignorantly, and yet passionately adored.

He said nothing to any one ; his grandfather would not have understood, and little Alois was lost to him. Only to Patrasche he told all, and whispered, “Rubens would give it me, I think, if he knew.”

Patrasche thought so too, for he knew that Rubens had loved dogs or he had never painted them with such exquisite fidelity ; and men who loved dogs were, as Patrasche knew, always pitiful.

The drawings were to go in on the first day

of December, and the decision be given on the twenty-fourth, so that he who should win might rejoice with all his people at the Christmas season.

In the twilight of a bitter wintry day, and with a beating heart, now quick with hope, now faint with fear, Nello placed the great picture on his little green milk cart, and took it, with the help of Patrasche, into the town, and there left it, as enjoined, at the doors of a public building.

“Perhaps it is worth nothing at all ; how can I tell ?” he thought, with the heartsickness of a great timidity. Now that he had left it there, it seemed to him so hazardous, so vain, so foolish, to dream that he, a little lad with bare feet who barely knew his letters, could do anything at which great painters, real artists, could ever deign to look. Yet he took heart as he went by the cathedral ; the lordly form of Rubens seemed to rise from the fog and the darkness, and to loom in its magnificence before him, while the lips, with their kindly smile, seemed to him to murmur, “Nay ; haye courage ! It was not by a weak heart and by faint fears that I wrote my name for all time upon Antwerp.”

Nello ran home through the cold night comforted. He had done his best ; the rest must be as God willed, he thought, in that innocent, unquestioning faith which had been taught him in the little gray chapel among the willows and the poplar trees.

The winter was very sharp already. That night after they had reached the hut, snow fell, and fell for very many days after that ; so that the paths and the divisions in the fields were all obliterated, and all the smaller streams were frozen over, and the cold was intense upon the plains. Then, indeed, it became hard work to go around for the milk while the world was all dark, and carry it through the darkness to the silent town. Hard work, especially for Patrasche ; for the passage of the years that were only bringing Nello a stronger youth were bringing him old age, and his joints were stiff and his bones ached often. But he would never give up his share of the labor. Nello would fain have spared him and drawn the cart himself, but Patrasche would not allow it. All he would ever permit or accept was the help of a thrust from behind to the truck as it lumbered along through the ice ruts. Patrasche had lived in harness, and he was proud of it. He suffered a great deal sometimes from frost and the terrible roads and the rheumatic pains of his limbs ; but he only drew his breath hard and bent his stout neck, and trod onward with steady patience.

“ Rest thee at home, Patrasche ; it is time thou didst rest, and I can quite well push in the cart by myself,” urged Nello many a morning ; but Patrasche, who understood him aright, would no more have consented to stay at home than a veteran soldier to shirk when the charge was sound-

ing ; and every day he would rise and place himself in his shafts, and plod along over the snow through the fields that his four round feet had left their print upon so many, many years.

“ One must never rest till one dies,” thought Patrasche ; and sometimes it seemed to him that that time of rest for him was not very far off. His sight was less clear than it had been, and it gave him pain to rise after the night’s sleep, though he would never lie a moment in his straw when once the bell of the chapel tolling five let him know that the daybreak of labor had begun.

“ My poor Patrasche, we shall soon lie quiet together, you and I,” said old Jehan Daas, stretching out to stroke the head of Patrasche with the old withered hand which had always shared with him its one poor crust of bread ; and the hearts of the old man and the old dog ached together with one thought : when they were gone who would care for their darling ?

One afternoon, as they came back from Antwerp over the snow, which had become hard and smooth as marble over all the Flemish plains, they found dropped in the road a pretty little puppet, a tambourine player, all scarlet and gold, about six inches high, and, unlike greater personages when Fortune lets them drop, quite unspoiled and unhurt by its fall. It was a pretty toy. Nello tried to find its owner, and, failing, thought that it was just the thing to please Alois.

It was quite night when he passed the mill house ; he knew the little window of her room ; it could be no harm, he thought, if he gave her his little piece of treasure-trove — they had been playfellows so long. There was a shed with a sloping roof beneath her casement ; he climbed it, and tapped softly at the lattice ; there was a little light within. The child opened it and looked out, half frightened.

Nello put the tambourine player into her hands. "Here is a doll I found in the snow, Alois. Take it," he whispered ; "take it, and God bless thee, dear !"

He slid down from the shed roof before she had time to thank him, and ran off through the darkness.

That night there was a fire at the mill. Outbuildings and much corn were destroyed, although the mill itself and the dwelling house were unharmed. All the village was out in terror, and engines came tearing through the snow from Antwerp. The miller was insured, and would lose nothing ; nevertheless he was in furious wrath, and declared aloud that the fire was due to no accident, but to some foul intent.

Nello, awakened from his sleep, ran to help with the rest. Baas Cogez thrust him angrily aside. "Thou wert loitering here after dark," he said roughly. "I believe, on my soul, that thou dost know more of the fire than any one."

Nello heard him in silence, stupefied, not supposing that any one could say such things except in jest, and not comprehending how any one could pass a jest at such a time.

Nevertheless the miller said the brutal thing openly to many of his neighbors in the day that followed ; and, though no serious charge was ever preferred against the lad, it got bruited about that Nello had been seen in the mill yard after dark on some unspoken errand, and that he bore Baas Cogez a grudge for forbidding his intercourse with little Alois ; and so the hamlet, which followed the sayings of its richest landowner servilely, and whose families all hoped to secure the riches of Alois in some future time for their sons, took the hint to give grave looks and cold words to old Jehan Daas's grandson. No one said anything to him openly, but all the village agreed together to humor the miller's prejudice, and at the cottages and farms where Nello and Patrasche called every morning for the milk for Antwerp, downcast glances and brief phrases replaced to them the broad smiles and cheerful greetings to which they had been always used. No one really credited the miller's absurd suspicions, nor the outrageous accusations born of them ; but the people were all very poor and very ignorant, and the one rich man of the place had pronounced against him. Nello, in his innocence and his friendlessness, had no strength to stem the popular tide.

"Thou art very cruel to the lad," the miller's wife dared to say, weeping, to her lord. "Sure, he is an innocent lad and a faithful, and would never dream of any such wickedness, however sore his heart might be."

But Baas Cogez, being an obstinate man, having once said a thing, held to it doggedly, though in his innermost soul he knew well the injustice that he was committing.

Meanwhile Nello endured the injury done against him with a certain proud patience that disdained to complain ; he only gave way a little when he was quite alone with old Patrasche. Besides he thought, "If it should win ! They will be sorry then perhaps."

Still, to a boy not quite sixteen, and who had dwelt in one little world all his short life, and in his childhood had been caressed and applauded on all sides, it was a hard trial to have the whole of that little world turn against him for naught. Especially hard in that bleak, snowbound, famine-stricken winter time, when the only light and warmth there could be found abode beside the village hearths and in the kindly greetings of neighbors. In the winter time all drew nearer to each other, all to all, except to Nello and Patrasche, with whom none now would have anything to do, and who were left to fare as they might with the old, paralyzed, bedridden man in the little cabin, whose fire was often low, and

whose board was often without bread ; for there was a buyer from Antwerp who had taken to drive his mule in of a day for the milk of the various dairies, and there were only three or four of the people who had refused his terms of purchase and remained faithful to the little green cart. So that the burden which Patrasche drew had become very light, and the centime¹ pieces in Nello's pouch had become, alas ! very small likewise.

The dog would stop, as usual, at all the familiar gates which were now closed to him, and look up at them with wistful, mute appeal ; and it cost the neighbors a pang to shut their doors and their hearts, and let Patrasche draw his cart on again empty. Nevertheless they did it, for they desired to please Baas Cogez.

Noël² was close at hand.

The weather was very wild and cold ; the snow was six feet deep, and the ice was firm enough to bear oxen and men upon it everywhere. At this season the little village was always gay and cheerful. At the poorest dwelling there were possets and cakes, joking and dancing, sugared saints and gilded Jésus. The merry Flemish bells jingled everywhere on the horses ; everywhere within doors some well-filled soup pot sang and smoked over the stove ; and everywhere

¹ A centime is but a small coin at best,—a fifth of a cent.

² Christmas.

over the snow without laughing maidens pattered in bright kerchiefs and stout kirtles, going to and from the mass. Only in the little hut it was very dark and very cold.

Nello and Patrasche were left utterly alone, for one night in the week before the Christmas Day death entered there, and took away from life forever old Jehan Daas, who had never known of life aught save its poverty and its pains. He had long been half dead, incapable of any movement except a feeble gesture, and powerless for anything beyond a gentle word ; and yet his loss fell on them both with a great horror in it ; they mourned him passionately. He had passed away from them in his sleep, and when in the gray dawn they learned their bereavement, unutterable solitude and desolation seemed to close around them. He had long been only a poor, feeble, paralyzed old man, who could not raise a hand in their defense ; but he had loved them well, his smile had always welcomed their return. They mourned for him unceasingly, refusing to be comforted, as in the white winter day they followed the deal shell that held his body to the nameless grave by the little gray church. They were his only mourners, these two whom he had left friendless upon earth — the young boy and the old dog.

“Surely he will relent now, and let the poor lad come hither ?” thought the miller’s wife,

glancing at her husband where he smoked by the hearth.

Baas Cogez knew her thought, but he hardened his heart, and would not unbar his door as the little, humble funeral went by. "The boy is a beggar," he said to himself; "he shall not be about Alois."

The woman dared not say anything aloud, but when the grave was closed and the mourners had gone, she put a wreath of immortelles into Alois's hands, and bade her go and lay it reverently on the dark, unmarked mound where the snow was displaced.

Nello and Patrasche went home with broken hearts. But even of that poor, melancholy, cheerless home they were denied the consolation. There was a month's rent overdue for their little home, and when Nello had paid the last sad service to the dead he had not a coin left. He went and begged grace of the owner of the hut, a cobbler who went every Sunday night to drink his pint of wine and smoke with Baas Cogez. The cobbler would grant no mercy. He was a harsh, miserly man, and loved money. He claimed in default of his rent every stick and stone, every pot and pan, in the hut, and bade Nello and Patrasche be out of it on the morrow.

Now the cabin was lowly enough, and in some sense miserable enough, and yet their hearts clove to it with a great affection. They had been so

happy there, and in the summer, with its clambering vine and its flowering beans, it was so pretty and bright in the midst of the sun-lighted fields ! Their life in it had been full of labor and privation, and yet they had been so well content, so gay of heart, running together to meet the old man's never-failing smile of welcome !

All night long the boy and the dog sat by the fireless hearth in the darkness, drawn close together for warmth and sorrow. Their bodies were insensible to the cold, but their hearts seemed frozen in them.

When the morning broke over the white, chill earth it was the morning of Christmas eve. With a shudder, Nello clasped close to him his only friend, while his tears fell hot and fast on the dog's frank forehead. "Let us go, Patrasche—dear, dear Patrasche," he murmured. "We will not wait to be kicked out; let us go."

Patrasche had no will but his, and they went sadly, side by side, out from the little place which was so dear to them both, and in which every humble, homely thing was to them precious and beloved. Patrasche drooped his head wearily as he passed by his own green cart ; it was no longer his,—it had to go with the rest to pay the rent,—and his brass harness lay idle and glittering on the snow. The dog could have lain down beside it and died for very heartsickness as he went, but while the lad lived and

needed him Patrasche would not yield and give way.

They took the old accustomed road into Antwerp. The day had yet scarce more than dawned ; most of the shutters were still closed, but some of the villagers were about. They took no notice while the dog and the boy passed by them. At one door Nello paused and looked wistfully within ; his grandfather had done many a kindly turn in neighbor's service to the people who dwelt there.

"Would you give Patrasche a crust ?" he said timidly. "He is old, and he has had nothing since last forenoon."

The woman shut the door hastily, murmuring some vague saying about wheat and rye being very dear that season. The boy and the dog went on again wearily ; they asked no more.

By slow and painful ways they reached Antwerp as the chimes tolled ten.

"If I had anything about me I could sell to get him bread !" thought Nello ; but he had nothing except the wisp of linen and serge that covered him, and his pair of wooden shoes.

Patrasche understood, and nestled his nose into the lad's hand as though to pray him not to be disquieted for any woe or want of his.

The winner of the drawing prize was to be proclaimed at noon, and to the public building where he had left his treasure Nello made his way. On

the steps and in the entrance hall was a crowd of youths,—some of his age, some older, all with parents or relatives or friends. His heart was sick with fear as he went among them holding Patrasche close to him. The great bells of the city clashed out the hour of noon with brazen clamor; the doors of the inner hall were opened; the eager, panting throng rushed in. It was known that the selected picture would be raised above the rest upon a wooden dais.

A mist obscured Nello's sight, his head swam, his limbs almost failed him. When his vision cleared he saw a drawing raised on high; it was not his own! A slow, sonorous voice was proclaiming aloud that victory had been adjudged to Stephan Kiesslinger, born in the burg of Antwerp, son of a wharfinger in that town.

When Nello recovered his consciousness he was lying on the stones without, and Patrasche was trying with every art he knew to call him back to life. In the distance a throng of the youths of Antwerp were shouting around their successful comrade, and escorting him with acclamations to his home upon the quay.

The boy staggered to his feet and drew the dog into his embrace. "It is all over, dear Patrasche," he murmured—"all over!"

He rallied himself as best he could, for he was weak from fasting, and retraced his steps to the village. Patrasche paced by his side, with his

head drooping and his old limbs feeble from hunger and sorrow.

The snow was falling fast ; a keen hurricane blew from the north ; it was bitter as death on the plains. It took them long to traverse the familiar path, and the bells were sounding four of the clock as they approached the hamlet. Suddenly Patrasche paused, arrested by a scent in the snow, scratched, whined, and drew out with his teeth a small case of brown leather. He held it up to Nello in the darkness. Where they were there stood a little Calvary, and a lamp burned dully under the cross ; the boy mechanically turned the case to the light ; on it was the name Baas Cogez, and within it were notes for two thousand francs.

The sight roused the lad a little from his stupor. He thrust it in his shirt, and stroked Patrasche and drew him onward. The dog looked up wistfully in his face.

Nello made straight for the mill house, and went to the house door and struck on its panels. The miller's wife opened it weeping, with little Alois clinging close to her skirts. "Is it thee, thou poor lad ?" she said, kindly, through her tears. "Get thee gone ere the Baas see thee. We are in sore trouble to-night. He is out seeking for a power of money that he has let fall riding homeward, and in this snow he never will find it ; and God knows it will go nigh to ruin us. It is

Heaven's own judgment for the things we have done to thee."

Nello put the note case in her hand, and called Patrasche within the house. "Patrasche found the money to-night," he said, quickly. "Tell Baas Cogez so; I think he will not deny the dog shelter and food in his old age. Keep him from pursuing me, and I pray of you to be good to him."

Ere either woman or dog knew what he meant he had stooped and kissed Patrasche, then closed the door hurriedly, and disappeared in the gloom of the fast-falling night.

The woman and the child stood speechless with joy and fear; Patrasche vainly spent the fury of his anguish against the iron-bound oak of the barred house door. They did not dare unbar the door and let him forth; they tried all they could to solace him. They brought him sweet cakes and juicy meats; they tempted him with the best they had; they tried to lure him to abide by the warmth of the hearth; but it was of no avail. Patrasche refused to be comforted or to stir from the barred portal.

It was six o'clock when from an opposite entrance the miller at last came, jaded and broken, into his wife's presence. "It is lost forever," he said, with an ashen cheek and a quiver in his stern voice. "We have looked with lanterns everywhere; it is gone — the little maiden's portion and all!"

His wife put the money into his hand, and told him how it had come to her. The strong man sank trembling into a seat and covered his face, ashamed and almost afraid. "I have been cruel to the lad," he muttered at length; "I deserved not to have good at his hands."

Little Alois, taking courage, crept close to her father and nestled against him her fair curly head. "Nello may come here again, father?" she whispered. "He may come to-morrow as he used to do?"

The miller pressed her in his arms; his hard, sunburnt face was very pale, and his mouth trembled. "Surely, surely," he answered his child. "He shall bide here on Christmas Day, and any other day he will. God helping me, I will make amends to the boy—I will make amends."

Little Alois kissed him in gratitude and joy; then slid from his knees and ran to where the dog kept watch by the door. "And to-night I may feast Patrasche?" she cried, in a child's thoughtless glee.

Her father bent his head gravely: "Ay, ay! let the dog have the best;" for the stern old man was moved and shaken to his heart's depths.

It was Christmas eve, and the mill house was filled with oak logs and squares of turf, with cream and honey, with meat and bread; and the rafters were hung with wreaths of evergreen, and the Calvary and the cuckoo clock looked out from a mass

of holly. There were little paper lanterns, too, for Alois, and toys of various fashions, and sweetmeats in bright-pictured papers. There were light and warmth and abundance everywhere, and the child would fain have made the dog a guest honored and feasted.

But Patrasche would neither lie in the warmth nor share in the cheer. Famished he was and very cold, but without Nello he would partake neither of comfort nor food. Against all temptation he was proof, and close against the door he leaned always, watching only for a means of escape.

"He wants the lad," said Baas Cogez. "Good dog ! good dog ! I will go over to the lad the first thing at day dawn." For no one but Patrasche knew that Nello had left the hut, and no one but Patrasche divined that Nello had gone to face starvation and misery alone.

The mill kitchen was very warm ; great logs crackled and flamed on the hearth ; neighbours came in for a glass of wine and a slice of the fat goose baking for supper. Alois, gleeful and sure of her playmate back on the morrow, bounded and sang and tossed back her yellow hair. Baas Cogez, in the fullness of his heart, smiled on her through moistened eyes, and spoke of the way in which he would befriend her favorite companion ; the house mother sat with calm, contented face at the spinning wheel ; the cuckoo in the clock chirped mirthful hours. Amid it all Patrasche was bidden

with a thousand words of welcome to tarry there a cherished guest ; but neither peace nor plenty could allure him where Nello was not.

When the supper smoked on the board, and the voices were loudest and gladdest, and the Christ child brought choicest gifts to Alois, Patrasche, watching always an occasion, glided out when the door was unlatched by a careless newcomer, and, as swiftly as his weak and tired limbs would bear him, sped over the snow in the bitter, black night. He had only one thought — to follow Nello. A human friend might have paused for the pleasant meal, the cheery warmth, the cozy slumber ; but that was not the friendship of Patrasche. He remembered a bygone time, when an old man and a little child had found him sick unto death in the wayside ditch.

Snow had fallen freshly all the evening long ; it was now nearly ten ; the trail of the boy's footsteps was almost obliterated. It took Patrasche long to discover any scent. When at last he found it, it was lost again quickly, and lost and recovered, and again lost and again recovered, a hundred times or more.

The night was very wild. The lamps under the wayside crosses were blown out ; the roads were sheets of ice ; the impenetrable darkness hid every trace of habitations ; there was no living thing abroad. All the cattle were housed, and in all the huts and homesteads men and women rejoiced and

feasted. There was only Patrasche out in the cruel cold — old and famished and full of pain, but with the strength and the patience of a great love to sustain him in his search.

The trail of Nello's steps, faint and obscure as it was under the new snow, went straightly along the accustomed tracks into Antwerp. It was past midnight when Patrasche traced it over the boundaries of the town and into the narrow, tortuous gloomy streets. It was all quite dark in the town, save where some light gleamed ruddily through the crevices of house shutters, or some group went homeward with lanterns, chanting drinking songs. The streets were all white with ice ; the high walls and roofs loomed black against them. There was scarce a sound save the riot of the winds down the passages as they tossed the creaking signs and shook the tall lamp irons.

So many passers-by had trodden through and through the snow, so many diverse paths had crossed and recrossed each other, that the dog had a hard task to retain any hold on the track he followed. But he kept on his way, though the cold pierced him to the bone, and the jagged ice cut his feet, and the hunger in his body gnawed like a rat's teeth. He kept on his way,— a poor, gaunt, shivering thing,— and by long patience traced the steps he loved into the very heart of the burg, and up to the steps of the great cathedral.

“He is gone to the things that he loved,”

thought Patrasche ; he could not understand, but he was full of sorrow and of pity for the art passion that to him was so incomprehensible and yet so sacred.

The portals of the cathedral were unclosed after the midnight mass. Some heedlessness in the custodians, too eager to go home and feast or sleep, or too drowsy to know whether they turned the keys aright, had left one of the doors unlocked. By that accident the footfalls Patrasche sought had passed through into the building, leaving the white marks of snow upon the dark stone floor. By that slender white thread, frozen as it fell, he was guided through the intense silence, through the immensity of the vaulted space — guided straight to the gates of the chancel, and, stretched there upon the stones, he found Nello. He crept up, and touched the face of the boy. “Didst thou dream that I should be faithless and forsake thee ? I — a dog ?” said that mute caress.

The lad raised himself with a low cry and clasped him close. “Let us lie down and die together,” he murmured. “Men have no need of us, and we are all alone.”

In answer, Patrasche crept closer yet, and laid his head upon the young boy’s breast. The great tears stood in his brown, sad eyes ; not for himself — for himself he was happy.

They lay close together in the piercing cold. The blasts that blew over the Flemish dikes from

the northern seas were like waves of ice, which froze every living thing they touched. The interior of the immense vault of stone in which they were was even more bitterly chill than the snow-covered plains without. Now and then a bat moved in the shadows; now and then a gleam of light came on the ranks of carven figures. Under the Rubens they lay together quite still, and soothed almost into a dreaming slumber by the numbing narcotic of the cold. Together they dreamed of the old glad days when they had chased each other through the flowering grasses of the summer meadows, or sat hidden in the tall bulrushes by the water's side, watching the boats go seaward in the sun.

Suddenly through the darkness a great white radiance streamed through the vastness of the aisles; the moon, that was at her height, had broken through the clouds; the snow had ceased to fall; the light reflected from the snow without was clear as the light of dawn. It fell through the arches full upon the two pictures above, from which the boy on his entrance had flung back the veil: the "Elevation" and the "Descent of the Cross" were for one instant visible.

Nello rose to his feet and stretched his arms to them; the tears of a passionate ecstasy glistened on the paleness of his face. "I have seen them at last!" he cried aloud. "O God, it is enough!"

His limbs failed under him, and he sank upon

his knees, still gazing upward at the majesty that he adored. For a few brief moments the light illumined the divine visions that had been denied to him so long — light clear and sweet and strong as though it streamed from the throne of heaven. Then suddenly it passed away ; once more a great darkness covered the face of Christ.

The arms of the boy drew close again the body of the dog. "We shall see His face — *there*," he murmured ; "and He will not part us, I think."

On the morrow, by the chancel of the cathedral, the people of Antwerp found them both. They were both dead ; the cold of the night had frozen into stillness alike the young life and the old. When the Christmas morning broke and the priests came to the temple, they saw them lying thus on the stones together. Above, the veils were drawn back from the great visions of Rubens, and the fresh rays of the sunrise touched the thorn-crowned head of the Christ.

As the day grew on there came an old, hard-featured man, who wept as women weep. "I was cruel to the lad," he muttered ; "and now I would have made amends, — yea, to the half of my substance, — and he should have been to me as a son."

There came also, as the day grew apace, a painter who had fame in the world, and who was liberal of hand and of spirit. "I seek one who should have had the prize yesterday, had worth won," he said to the people — "a boy of rare

promise and genius. An old woodcutter on a fallen tree at eventide — that was all his theme ; but there was greatness for the future in it. I would fain find him, and take him with me and teach him art."

And a little child with curling fair hair, sobbing bitterly as she clung to her father's arm, cried aloud, "O Nello, come ! We have all ready for thee. The Christ child's hands are full of gifts, and the old piper will play for us ; and the mother says thou shalt stay by the hearth and burn nuts with us all the Noël week long — yes, even to the Feast of the Kings ! And Patrasche will be so happy ! O Nello, wake and come ! "

But the young, pale face, turned upward to the light of the great Rubens with a smile upon its mouth, answered them all, " It is too late."

For the sweet, sonorous bells went ringing through the frost, and the sunlight shone upon the plains of snow, and the populace trooped gay and glad through the streets ; but Nello and Patrasche no more asked charity at their hands. All they needed now Antwerp gave unbidden.

Death had been more pitiful to them than longer life would have been. It had taken the one in the loyalty of love, and the other in the innocence of faith, from a world which for love has no recompense and for faith no fulfillment.

All their lives they had been together, and in their deaths they were not divided ; for when they

were found, the arms of the boy were folded too closely around the dog to be severed without violence, and the people of their little village, contrite and ashamed, implored a special grace for them, and, making them one grave, laid them to rest there side by side — forever!

THE SIRE DE MALÉTROIT'S DOOR

BY ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

DENIS DE BEAULIEU was not yet two-and-twenty, but he counted himself a grown man, and a very accomplished cavalier into the bargain. Lads were early formed in that rough, warfaring epoch ; and when one has been in a pitched battle and a dozen raids, has killed one's man in an honorable fashion, and knows a thing or two of strategy and mankind, a certain swagger in the gait is surely to be pardoned. He had put up his horse with due care, and supped with due deliberation ; and then, in a very agreeable frame of mind, went out to pay a visit in the gray of the evening. It was not a very wise proceeding on the young man's part. He would have done better to remain beside the fire or go decently to bed. For the town was full of the troops of Burgundy and England under a mixed command¹ ; and though Denis was there on safe-conduct,² his safe-conduct was like to serve him little on a chance encounter.

¹ A mixed command, *i.e.* with no single authority over them.

² Denis was presumably attached to the fortunes of the king of France, and so hostile to the English and Burgundians.

It was September, 1429¹; the weather had fallen sharp; a flighty, piping wind, laden with showers, beat about the township,² and the dead leaves ran riot along the streets. Here and there a window was already lighted up; and the noise of men-at-arms making merry over supper within, came forth in fits and was swallowed up and carried away by the wind. The night fell swiftly; the flag of England, fluttering on the spire top, grew ever fainter and fainter against the flying clouds—a black speck like a swallow in the tumultuous, leaden chaos of the sky. As the night fell the wind rose, and began to hoot under archways and roar amid the treetops in the valley below the town.

Denis de Beaulieu walked fast and was soon knocking at his friend's door; but though he promised himself to stay only a little while and make an early return, his welcome was so pleasant, and he found so much to delay him, that it

¹ The date, and the place afterward, are given us that we may have a sort of background for the story. The time falls in a period when France was torn to pieces by foreign and domestic enemies. The English kings claimed Normandy and other western provinces; the Dukes of Burgundy were practically independent monarchs in the eastern parts; and so at this time were the kings of Navarre and the Counts of Provence in the South; even France itself, what there was of it, compared with the country to-day, was a mere quarreling ground for powerful nobles. The year 1429, however, was the year in which Joan of Arc arose to help the weak Charles VII against his two most powerful enemies.

² A curious word to use here; in England and America it has a specific meaning.

was already long past midnight before he said good-by upon the threshold. The wind had fallen again in the meantime; the night was as black as the grave; not a star nor a glimmer of moonshine slipped through the canopy of cloud. Denis was ill acquainted with the intricate lanes of Chateau Landon¹; even by daylight he had found some trouble in picking his way; and in this absolute darkness he soon lost it altogether. He was certain of one thing only—to keep mounting the hill; for his friend's house lay at the lower end, or tail, of Chateau Landon, while the inn was up at the head, under the great church spire. With this clew to go upon he stumbled and groped forward, now breathing more freely in open places where there was a good slice of sky overhead, now feeling along the wall in stifling closes.² It is an eerie and mysterious position to be thus submerged in opaque blackness in an almost unknown town. The silence is terrifying in its possibilities. The touch of cold window bars to the exploring hand startles the man like the touch of a toad; the inequalities of the pavement shake his heart into his mouth; a piece of denser darkness threatens an ambuscade or a chasm in the pathway; and where the air is brighter, the

¹ Chateau Landon is still a town of France, about sixty miles south of Paris, and equally far from what was, in 1429, the frontier of Burgundy.

² Close is the name applied, more usually in Scotland, to a narrow lane in a city.

houses put on strange and bewildering appearances, as if to lead him farther from his way. For Denis, who had to regain his inn without attracting notice, there was real danger as well as mere discomfort in the walk¹; and he went warily and boldly at once, and at every corner paused to make an observation.

He had been for some time threading a lane so narrow that he could touch a wall with either hand when it began to open out and go sharply downward. Plainly this lay no longer in the direction of his inn; but the hope of a little more light tempted him forward to reconnoiter. The lane ended in a terrace with a bartizan wall,² which gave an outlook between high houses, as out of an embrasure, into the valley lying dark and formless several hundred feet below. Denis looked down, and could discern a few treetops waving and a single speck of brightness where the river ran across a weir. The weather was clearing up, and the sky had lightened, so as to show the outline of the heavier clouds and the dark margin of the hills. By the uncertain glimmer, the house on his left hand should be a place of some pretensions; it was surmounted by several pinnacles and turret-tops; the round stern³ of a chapel,

¹ It was an unsettled time, and things were dangerous at night.

² A bartizan is a little tower, here perhaps extending from the terrace over the lower level.

³ More commonly called the apse.

with a fringe of flying buttresses,¹ projected boldly from the main block; and the door was sheltered under a deep porch carved with figures and overhung by two long gargoyle.² The windows of the chapel gleamed through their intricate tracery with a light as of many tapers, and threw out the buttresses and the peaked roof in a more intense blackness against the sky. It was plainly the hotel of some great family of the neighborhood; and as it reminded Denis of a townhouse of his own at Bourges, he stood for some time gazing up at it and mentally gauging the skill of the architects and the consideration of the two families.

There seemed to be no issue to the terrace but the lane by which he had reached it; he could only retrace his steps, but he had gained some notion of his whereabouts, and hoped by this means to hit the main thoroughfare and speedily regain the inn. He was reckoning without that chapter of accidents which was to make this night memorable above all others in his career; for he had not gone back over a hundred yards before he saw a light coming to meet him, and heard loud voices speaking together in the echoing narrows of the lane. It was a party of men-at-arms going the night round³ with torches. Denis

¹ A kind of support for the wall in Gothic architecture.

² Water spouts carved into grotesque and fantastic shapes.

³ A night round was a sort of ancient and irregular police-duty.

assured himself that they had all been making free with the wine bowl, and were in no mood to be particular about safe-conducts or the niceties of chivalrous war. It was as like as not that they would kill him like a dog and leave him where he fell. The situation was inspiriting but nervous. Their own torches would conceal him from sight, he reflected ; and he hoped that they would drown the noise of his footsteps with their own empty voices. If he were but fleet and silent, he might evade their notice altogether.

Unfortunately, as he turned to beat a retreat, his foot rolled upon a pebble ; he fell against the wall with an ejaculation, and his sword rang loudly on the stones. Two or three voices demanded who went there — some in French, some in English ; but Denis made no reply, and ran the faster down the lane. Once upon the terrace he paused to look back. They still kept calling after him, and just then began to double the pace in pursuit, with a considerable clank of armor, and great tossing of the torchlight to and fro in the narrow jaws of the passage.

Denis cast a look around and darted into the porch. There he might escape observation, or — if that were too much to expect — was in a capital posture whether for parley or defence. So thinking, he drew his sword and tried to set his back against the door. To his surprise, it yielded behind his weight ; and though he turned in a

moment, continued to swing back on oiled and noiseless hinges, until it stood wide open on a black interior. When things fall out opportunely for the person concerned, he is not apt to be critical about the how or why, his own immediate personal convenience seeming a sufficient reason for the strangest oddities and revolutions in our sublunary things; and so Denis, without a moment's hesitation, stepped within and partly closed the door behind him to conceal his place of refuge. Nothing was futher from his thoughts than to close it altogether; but for some inexplicable reason — perhaps by a spring or a weight — the ponderous mass of oak whipped itself out of his fingers and clanked to, with a formidable rumble and a noise like the falling of an automatic bar.

The round, at that very moment, debouched¹ upon the terrace and proceeded to summon him with shouts and curses. He heard them ferreting in the dark corners; the stock of a lance even rattled along the outer surface of the door behind which he stood; but these gentlemen were in too high a humor to be long delayed, and soon made off down a corkscrew pathway which had escaped Denis's observation, and passed out of sight and hearing along the battlements of the town.

Denis breathed again. He gave them a few minutes' grace for fear of accidents, and then groped about for some means of opening the door

¹ Came out.

and slipping forth again. The inner surface was quite smooth, not a handle, not a molding, not a projection of any sort. He got his finger-nails round the edges and pulled, but the mass was immovable. He shook it, it was as firm as a rock. Denis de Beaulieu frowned and gave vent to a little noiseless whistle. What ailed the door? he wondered. Why was it open? How came it to shut so easily and so effectually after him? There was something obscure and underhand about all this, that was little to the young man's fancy. It looked like a snare; and yet who could suppose a snare in such a quiet by-street and in a house of so prosperous and even noble an exterior? And yet—snare or no snare, intentionally or unintentionally—here he was, prettily trapped; and for the life of him he could see no way out of it again. The darkness began to weigh upon him. He gave ear; all was silent without, but within and close by he seemed to catch a faint sighing, a faint, sobbing rustle, a little stealthy creak—as though many persons were at his side, holding themselves quite still, and governing even their respiration with the extreme of slyness. The idea went to his vitals with a shock, and he faced about suddenly as if to defend his life. Then, for the first time, he became aware of a light about the level of his eyes and at some distance in the interior of the house—a vertical thread of light, widening toward the bottom, such as might escape between

two wings of arras¹ over a doorway. To see anything was a relief to Denis; it was like a piece of solid ground to a man laboring in a morass; his mind seized upon it with avidity; and he stood staring at it and trying to piece together some logical conception of his surroundings. Plainly there was a flight of steps ascending from his own level to that of this illuminated doorway; and indeed he thought he could make out another thread of light, as fine as a needle and as faint as phosphorescence, which might very well be reflected along the polished wood of a handrail. Since he had begun to suspect that he was not alone, his heart had continued to beat with smothering violence, and an intolerable desire for action of any sort had possessed itself of his spirit. He was in deadly peril, he believed. What could be more natural than to mount the staircase, lift the curtain and confront his difficulty at once? At least he would be dealing with something tangible; at least he would be no longer in the dark. He stepped slowly forward with outstretched hands, until his foot struck the bottom step; then he rapidly scaled the stair, stood for a moment to compose his expression, lifted the arras and went in.

He found himself in a large apartment of polished stone. There were three doors; one

¹ The tapestry which was so common a piece of house-furnishing in the Middle Ages.

on each of three sides ; all similarly curtained with tapestry. The fourth side was occupied by two large windows and a great stone chimney-piece, carved with the arms of the Malétroits. Denis recognized the bearings,¹ and was gratified to find himself in such good hands. The room was strongly illuminated ; but it contained little furniture except a heavy table and a chair or two, the hearth was innocent of fire, and the pavement was but sparsely strewn with rushes clearly many days old.

On a high chair beside the chimney, and directly facing Denis as he entered, sat a little old gentleman in a fur tippet. He sat with his legs crossed and his hands folded, and a cup of spiced wine stood by his elbow on a bracket on the wall. His countenance had a strongly masculine cast ; not properly human, but such as we see in the bull, the goat, or the domestic boar ; something equivocal and wheedling, something greedy, brutal and dangerous. The upper lip was inordinately full, as though swollen by a blow or a toothache ; and the smile, the peaked eyebrows, and the small, strong eyes were quaintly and almost comically evil in expression. Beautiful white hair hung straight all round his head, like a saint's, and fell in a single curl upon the tippet. His beard and mustache were the pink of ven-

¹ The heraldic device of every noble house was necessarily known to all the rest of the nobility.

erable sweetness. Age, probably in consequence of inordinate precautions, had left no mark upon his hands; and the Malétroit hand was famous. It would be difficult to imagine anything at once so fleshly and so delicate in design; the taper, sensual fingers were like those of one of Leonardo's women¹; the fork of the thumb made a dimpled protuberance when closed; the nails were perfectly shaped, and of a dead, surprising whiteness. It rendered his aspect tenfold more redoubtable, that a man with hands like these should keep them devoutly folded like a virgin martyr—that a man with so intent and startling an expression of face should sit patiently on his seat and contemplate people with an unwinking stare, like a god, or a god's statue. His quiescence seemed ironical and treacherous, it fitted so poorly with his looks.

Such was Alain, Sire de Malétroit.

Denis and he looked silently at each other for a second or two.

"Pray step in," said the Sire de Malétroit. "I have been expecting you all the evening."

He had not risen but he accompanied his words with a smile and a slight but courteous inclination of the head. Partly from the smile, partly from the strange musical murmur with which the Sire prefaced his observation, Denis felt a strong shud-

¹ Leonardo da Vinci, one of the greatest of Italian painters, is famous for his portraits of women.

der of disgust go through his marrow. And what with disgust and honest confusion of mind, he could scarcely get words together in reply.

"I fear," he said, "that this is a double accident. I am not the person you suppose me. It seems you were looking for a visit; but for my part, nothing was further from my thoughts — nothing could be more contrary to my wishes — than this intrusion."

"Well, well," replied the old gentleman indulgently, "here you are, which is the main point. Seat yourself, my friend, and put yourself entirely at your ease. We shall arrange our little affairs presently."

Denis preceived that the matter was still complicated with some misconception, and he hastened to continue his explanations.

"Your door . . ." he began.

"About my door?" asked the other, raising his peaked eyebrows. "A little piece of ingenuity." And he shrugged his shoulders. "A hospitable fancy! By your own account, you were not desirous of making my acquaintance. We old people look for such reluctance now and then; when it touches our honor, we cast about until we find some way of overcoming it. You arrive uninvited, but believe me, very welcome."

"You persist in error, sir," said Denis. "There can be no question between you and me. I am a stranger in this countryside. My name is Denis,

damoiseau¹ de Beaulieu. If you see me in your house, it is only — ”

“ My young friend,” interrupted the other, “ you will permit me to have my own ideas on that subject. They probably differ from yours at the present moment,” he added with a leer, “ but time will show which of us is in the right.”

Denis was convinced he had to do with a lunatic. He seated himself with a shrug, content to wait the upshot; and a pause ensued, during which he thought he could distinguish a hurried gabbling as of prayer from behind the arras immediately opposite him. Sometimes there seemed to be but one person engaged, sometimes two; and the vehemence of the voice, low as it was, seemed to indicate either great haste or an agony of spirit. It occurred to him that this piece of tapestry covered the entrance to the chapel he had noticed from without.

The old gentleman meanwhile surveyed Denis from head to foot with a smile, and from time to time emitted little noises like a bird or a mouse, which seemed to indicate a high degree of satisfaction. This state of matters became rapidly insupportable; and Denis, to put an end to it, remarked politely that the wind had gone down.

The old gentleman fell into a fit of silent laughter, so prolonged and violent that he be-

¹ The French word or title of which *damoiselle*, whence *mademoiselle*, is the feminine. It was given to young men of family.

came quite red in the face. Denis got upon his feet at once, and put on his hat with a flourish.

"Sir," he said, "if you are in your wits, you have affronted me grossly. If you are out of them I flatter myself I can find better employment for my brains than to talk with lunatics. My conscience is clear; you have made a fool of me from the first moment; you have refused to hear my explanations; and now there is no power under God will make me stay here any longer; and if I cannot make my way out in a more decent fashion, I will hack your door in pieces with my sword."

The Sire de Malétroit raised his right hand and wagged it at Denis with the fore and little fingers extended.

"My dear nephew," he said, "sit down."

"Nephew!" retorted Denis, "you lie in your throat," and he snapped his fingers in his face.

"Sit down, you rogue!" cried the old gentleman, in a sudden harsh voice, like the barking of a dog. "Do you fancy," he went on, "that when I had made my little contrivance for the door I had stopped short with that? If you prefer to be bound hand and foot till your bones ache, rise and try to go away. If you choose to remain a free young buck, agreeably conversing with an old gentleman—why, sit where you are in peace, and God be with you."

"Do you mean I am a prisoner?" demanded Denis.

"I state the facts," replied the other. "I would rather leave the conclusion to yourself."

Denis sat down again. Externally he managed to keep pretty calm, but within he was now boiling with anger, now chilled with apprehension. He no longer felt convinced that he was dealing with a madman. And if the old gentleman was sane, what, in God's name, had he to look for? What absurd or tragical adventure had befallen him? What countenance was he to assume?

While he was thus unpleasantly reflecting, the arras that overhung the chapel door was raised, and a tall priest in his robes came forth, and, giving a long, keen stare at Denis, said something in an undertone to Sire de Maléroit.

"She is in a better frame of spirit?" asked the latter.

"She is more resigned, messire," replied the priest.

"Now the Lord help her, she is hard to please!" sneered the old gentleman. "A likely stripling — not ill-born — and of her own choosing, too? Why, what more would the jade have?"

"The situation is not usual for a young damsel," said the other, "and somewhat trying to her blushes."

"She should have thought of that before she began the dance! It was none of my choosing,

God knows that; but since she is in it, by our lady, she shall carry it to the end." And then addressing Denis, "Monsieur de Beaulieu," he asked, "may I present you to my niece? She has been waiting your arrival, I may say, with even greater impatience than myself."

Denis had resigned himself with a good grace — all he desired to know was the worst of it as speedily as possible; so he rose at once, and bowed in acquiescence. The Sire de Malétroit followed his example and limped, with the assistance of the chaplain's arm, toward the chapel door. The priest pulled aside the arras, and all three entered. The building had considerable architectural pretensions. A light groining¹ sprang from six stout columns, and hung down in two rich pendants from the center of the vault. The place terminated behind the altar in a round end, embossed and honeycombed with a superfluity of ornament in relief, and pierced by many little windows shaped like stars, trefoils,² or wheels. These windows were imperfectly glazed, so that the night air circulated freely in the chapel. The tapers, of which there must have been half a hun-

¹ An arrangement of the ceiling formed by the intersection of several curved surfaces. In this case there were six columns, two to each side, probably, and the others in what is called "the stern of the chapel," between each pair of which was a wall space or a window; as these wall spaces were carried into the roof, they of course intersected with each other, forming the groining.

² A common shape of window in architectural ornament.

dred burning on the altar, were unmercifully blown about; and the light went through many different phases of brilliancy and semi-eclipse. On the steps in front of the altar knelt a young girl richly attired as a bride. A chill settled over Denis as he observed her costume; he fought with desperate energy against the conclusion that was being thrust upon his mind; it could not—should not—be as he feared.

"*Blanche*," said the Sire, in his most flutelike tones, "I have brought a friend to see you, my little girl; turn round and give him your pretty hand. It is good to be devout; but it is necessary to be polite, my niece."

The girl rose to her feet and turned toward the newcomers. She moved all of a piece; and shame and exhaustion were expressed in every line of her fresh, young body; and she held her head down and kept her eyes upon the pavement, as she came slowly forward. In the course of her advance, her eyes fell upon Denis de Beaulieu's feet—feet of which he was justly vain, be it remarked, and wore in the most elegant accouterment even while traveling. She paused—started, as if his yellow boots had conveyed some shocking meaning—and glanced suddenly up into the wearer's countenance. Their eyes met; shame gave place to horror and terror in her looks; the blood left her lips; with a piercing scream she covered her face and sank upon the chapel floor.

"That is not the man!" she cried. "My uncle, that is not the man!"

The Sire de Malétroit chirped agreeably. "Of course not," he said, "I expected as much. It was so unfortunate you could not remember his name."

"Indeed," she cried, "indeed, I have never seen this person till this moment—I have never so much as set eyes upon him—I never wish to see him again. Sir," she said, turning to Denis, "if you are a gentleman you will bear me out. Have I ever seen you—have you ever seen me—before this accursed hour?"

"To speak for myself, I have never had that pleasure," answered the young man. "This is the first time, messire, that I have met with your engaging niece."

The old man shrugged his shoulders.

"I am distressed to hear it," he said. "But it is never too late to begin. I had little more acquaintance with my own late lady ere I married her; which proves," he added, with a grimace, "that these impromptu marriages may often produce an excellent understanding in the long run. As the bridegroom is to have a voice in the matter, I will give him two hours to make up for lost time before we proceed with the ceremony." And he turned toward the door followed by the clergyman.

The girl was on her feet in a moment. "My

uncle, you cannot be in earnest," she said. "I declare before God I will stab myself rather than be forced on that young man. The heart rises at it ; God forbids such marriages ; you dishonor your white hair. Oh, my uncle, pity me ! There is not a woman in all the world but would prefer death to such a nuptial. Is it possible," she added, faltering — "is it possible that you do not believe me — that you still think this" — and she pointed at Denis with a tremor of anger and contempt — "that you still think this to be the man ? "

" Frankly," said the old gentleman, pausing on the threshold, " I do. But let me explain to you once for all, Blanche de Malétraut, my way of thinking about this affair. When you took it into your head to dishonor my family and the name that I have borne, in peace and war, for more than three score years, you forfeited, not only the right to question my designs, but that of looking me in the face. If your father had been alive, he would have spat on you and turned you out-of-doors. His was the hand of iron. You may bless your God you have only to deal with the hand of velvet, mademoiselle. It was my duty to get you married without delay. Out of pure good will, I have tried to find your own gallant for you. And I believe I have succeeded. But before God and all the holy angels, Blanche de Malétraut, if I have not, I care not

one jackstraw. So let me recommend you to be polite to our young friend ; for upon my word, your next groom may be less appetizing."

And with that he went out, with the chaplain at his heels ; and the arras fell behind the pair.

The girl turned upon Denis with flashing eyes.

" And what, sir," she demanded, " may be the meaning of all this ? "

" God knows," returned Denis, gloomily. " I am a prisoner in this house, which seems full of mad people. More I know not, and nothing do I understand."

" And pray how came you here ? " she asked.

He told her as briefly as he could. " For the rest," he added, " perhaps you will follow my example, and tell me the answer to all these riddles, and what, in God's name, is like to be the end of it."

She stood silent for a little, and he could see her lips tremble and her tearless eyes burn with a feverish luster. Then she pressed her forehead in both hands.

" Alas, how my head aches ! " she said wearily — " to say nothing of my poor heart ! But it is due to you to know my story, unmaidenly as it must seem. I am called Blanche de Malétroit ; I have been without father or mother for — oh ! for as long as I can recollect, and indeed I have been most unhappy all my life. Three months ago a young captain began to stand near me every day

in church. I could see that I pleased him ; I am much to blame, but I was so glad that any one should love me ; and when he passed me a letter, I took it home with me and read it with great pleasure. Since that time he has written many. He was so anxious to speak with me, poor fellow ! and kept asking me to leave the door open some evening that we might have two words upon the stair. For he knew how much my uncle trusted me." She gave something like a sob at that, and it was a moment before she could go on. " My uncle is a hard man, but he is very shrewd," she said at last. " He has performed many feats in war, and was a great person at court, and much trusted by Queen Isabeau¹ in old days. How he came to suspect me I cannot tell ; but it is hard to keep anything from his knowledge ; and this morning, as we came from mass, he took my hand into his, forced it open and read my little billet, walking by my side all the while. When he finished, he gave it back to me with great politeness. It contained another request to have the door left open ; and this has been the ruin of us all. My uncle kept me strictly in my room until evening, and then ordered me to dress myself as you see me — a hard mockery for a young girl, do

¹ Isabella of Bavaria was a German princess, married in her youth to the unfortunate Charles VI, who subsequently became mad. She was married in 1489, at which time Sire de Malétroit would have been about coming of age. She was a woman of strong character, and in her court he doubtless had good schooling.

you not think so? I suppose when he could not prevail with me to tell him the young captain's name, he must have laid a trap for him; into which, alas! you have fallen in the anger of God. I looked for much confusion; for how could I tell whether he was willing to take me for his wife on these sharp terms? He might have been trifling with me from the first; or I might have made myself too cheap in his eyes. But truly I had not looked for such a shameful punishment as this! I could not think that God would let a girl be so disgraced before a young man. And now I tell you all; and I scarcely hope that you will not despise me."

Denis made her a respectful inclination.

"Madam," he said, "you have honored me by your confidence. It remains for me to prove that I am not unworthy of the honor. Is Messire de Malétroit at hand?"

"I believe he is writing in the salle without," she answered.

"May I lead you thither, madam?" asked Denis, offering his hand with his most courtly bearing.

She accepted it; and the pair passed out of the chapel, Blanche in a very drooping and shamefast condition, but Denis strutting and ruffling in the consciousness of a mission, and the boyish certainty of accomplishing it with honor.

The Sire de Malétroit rose to meet them with an ironical obeisance.

"Sir," said Denis, with the grandest possible air, "I believe I am to have some say in the matter of this marriage ; and let me tell you at once I will be no party to forcing the inclination of this young lady. Had it been freely offered to me, I should have been proud to accept her hand, for I perceive she is as good as she is beautiful ; but as things are, I have now the honor, messire, of refusing."

Blanche looked at him with gratitude in her eyes ; but the old gentleman only smiled and smiled, until his smile grew positively sickening to Denis.

"I am afraid," he said, "Monsieur de Beaulieu, that you do not perfectly understand the choice I have offered you. Follow me, I beseech you, to this window." And he led the way to one of the large windows which stood open on the night. "You observe," he went on, "there is an iron ring in the upper masonry, and reeved through that a very efficacious rope. Now, mark my words : if you should find your disinclination to my niece's person insurmountable, I shall have you hanged out of this window before sunrise. I shall only proceed to such an extremity with the greatest regret, you may believe me. For it is not at all your death that I desire, but my niece's establishment in life. At the same time, it must come to that if you prove obstinate. Your family, Monsieur de Beaulieu, is very well in its way ; but if you sprang from

Charlemagne, you should not refuse the hand of a Malétroit with impunity — not if she had been as common as the Paris road — not if she were as hideous as the gargoyle over my door. Neither my niece nor you, nor my own private feelings, move me at all in this matter. The honor of my house has been compromised ; I believe you to be the guilty person, at least you are now in the secret ; and you can hardly wonder if I request you to wipe out the stain. If you will not, your blood be on your own head ! It will be no great satisfaction to me to have your interesting relics kicking their heels in the breeze below my windows, but half a loaf is better than no bread, and if I cannot cure the dishonor, I shall at least stop the scandal."

There was a pause.

"I believe there are other ways of settling such imbroglios among gentlemen," said Denis. "You wear a sword, and I hear you have used it with distinction."

The Sire de Malétroit made a signal to the chaplain, who crossed the room with long, silent strides and raised the arras over the third of the three doors. It was only a moment before he let it fall again ; but Denis had time to see a dusky passage full of armed men.

"When I was a little younger, I should have been delighted to honor you, Monsieur de Beau-lieu," said Sire Alain ; "but I am now too old.

Faithful retainers are the sinews of age, and I must employ the strength I have. This is one of the hardest things to swallow as a man grows up in years; but with a little patience, even this becomes habitual. You and the lady seem to prefer the salle for what remains of your two hours, and as I have no desire to cross your preference, I shall resign it to your use with all the pleasure in the world. No haste!" he added, holding up his hand, as he saw a dangerous look come into Denis de Beaulieu's face. "If your mind revolt against hanging, it will be time enough two hours hence to throw yourself out of the window or upon the pikes of my retainers. Two hours of life are always two hours. A great many things may turn up in even as little a while as that. And, besides, if I understand her appearance, my niece has something to say to you. You will not disfigure your last hours by want of politeness to a lady?"

Denis looked at Blanche, and she made him an imploring gesture.

It is likely that the old gentleman was hugely pleased at this symptom of an understanding; for he smiled on both, and added sweetly: "If you will give me your word of honor, Monsieur de Beaulieu, to await my return at the end of the two hours before attempting anything desperate, I shall withdraw my retainers, and let you speak in greater privacy with mademoiselle."

Denis again glanced at the girl, who seemed to beseech him to agree.

"I give you my word of honor," he said.

Messire de Malétroit bowed, and proceeded to limp about the apartment, clearing his throat the while with that odd musical chirp which had already grown so irritating in the ears of Denis de Beaulieu. He first possessed himself of some papers which lay upon the table; then he went to the mouth of the passage and appeared to give an order to the men behind the arras; and lastly he hobbled out through the door by which Denis had come in, turning upon the threshold to address a last smiling bow to the young couple, and followed by the chaplain with a hand lamp.

No sooner were they alone than Blanche advanced toward Denis with her hands extended. Her face was flushed and excited, and her eyes shone with tears.

"You shall not die!" she cried; "you shall marry me after all."

"You seem to think, madam," replied Denis, "that I stand much in fear of death."

"Oh, no, no," she said, "I see you are no poltroon. It is for my own sake—I could not bear to have you slain for such a scruple."

"I am afraid," returned Denis, "that you underrate the difficulty, madam. What you may be too generous to refuse, I may be too proud to accept. In a moment of noble feeling toward

me, you forgot what you perhaps owe to others."¹

He had the decency to keep his eyes on the floor as he said this, and after he had finished, so as not to spy upon her confusion. She stood silent for a moment, then walked suddenly away, and falling on her uncle's chair, fairly burst out sobbing. Denis was in the acme of embarrassment. He looked round, as if to seek for inspiration, and seeing a stool, plumped down upon it for something to do. There he sat playing with the guard of his rapier, and wishing himself dead a thousand times over, and buried in the nastiest kitchen-heap in France. His eyes wandered round the apartment, but found nothing to arrest them. There were such wide spaces between the furniture, the light fell so badly and cheerlessly over all, the dark outside air looked in so coldly through the windows, that he thought he had never seen a church so vast, nor a tomb so melancholy. The regular sobs of Blanche de Malé-troit measured out the time like the ticking of a clock. He read the device upon the shield over and over again, until his eyes became obscured ; he stared into shadowy corners until he imagined they were swarming with horrible animals ; and every now and again he awoke with a start, to remember that his last two hours were running, and death was on the march.

¹ If she were in love with another she had obligations to him.

Oftener and oftener, as the time went on, did his glance settle on the girl herself. Her face was bowed forward and covered with her hands, and she was shaken at intervals by the convulsive hiccough of grief. Even thus she was not an unpleasant object to dwell upon, so plump and yet so fine, with a warm brown skin, and the most beautiful hair, Denis thought, in the whole world of womankind. Her hands were like her uncle's; but they were more in place at the end of her young arms, and looked infinitely soft and caressing. He remembered how her blue eyes had shone upon him, full of anger, pity, and innocence. And the more he dwelt on her perfections, the uglier death looked, and the more deeply was he smitten with penitence at her continued tears. Now he felt that no man could have the courage to leave the world which contained so beautiful a creature; and now he would have given forty minutes of his last hours to have unsaid his cruel speech.

Suddenly a hoarse and ragged peal of cockerow rose to their ears from the dark valley below the windows. And this shattering noise in the silence of all around was like a light in a dark place, and shook them both out of their reflections.

"Alas, can I do nothing to help you!" she said, looking up.

"Madam," replied Denis, with a fine irrelevancy, "if I have said anything to wound you,

believe me, it was for your own sake and not for mine."

She thanked him with a tearful look.

"I feel your position cruelly," he went on. "The world has been bitter hard on you. Your uncle is a disgrace to mankind. Believe me, madam, there is no young gentleman in all France but would be glad of my opportunity, to die in doing you a momentary service."

"I know already that you can be very brave and generous," she answered. "What I want to know is whether I can serve you — now or afterward," she added, with a quaver.

"Most certainly," he answered with a smile. "Let me sit beside you as if I were a friend, instead of a foolish intruder; try to forget how awkwardly we are placed to one another; make my last moments go pleasantly; and you will do me the chief service possible."

"You are very gallant," she added, with a yet deeper sadness . . . "very gallant . . . and it somehow pains me. But draw nearer, if you please; and if you find anything to say to me, you will at least make certain of a very friendly listener. Ah! Monsieur de Beaulieu," she broke forth—"ah, Monsieur de Beaulieu, how can I look you in the face?" And she fell to weeping again with a renewed effusion.

"Madam," said Denis, taking her hand in both of his, "reflect on the little time I have before me,

and the great bitterness into which I am cast by the sight of your distress. Spare me, in my last moments, the spectacle of what I cannot cure even with the sacrifice of my life."

"I am very selfish," answered Blanche. "I will be braver, Monsieur de Beaulieu, for your sake. But think if I can do you no kindness in the future—if you have no friends to whom I could carry your adieux. Charge me as heavily as you can; every burden will lighten, by so little, the invaluable gratitude I owe you. Put it in my power to do something more for you than weep."

"My mother is married again, and has a young family to care for. My brother Guichard will inherit my fiefs¹; and, if I am not in error, that will content him amply for my death. Life is a little vapor that passeth away, as we are told by those in holy orders. When a man is in a fair way and sees all life open in front of him, he seems to himself to make a very important figure in the world. His horse whinnies to him; the trumpets blow and the girls look out of window as he rides into town before his company; he receives many assurances of trust and regard—sometimes by express in a letter—sometimes face to face, with persons of great consequence falling on his neck. It is not wonderful if his head is turned for a time. But once he is dead,

¹ Possessions which by the feudal arrangement of things Denis de Beaulieu held of some greater noble.

were he as brave as Hercules or as wise as Solomon, he is soon forgotten. It is not ten years since my father fell, with many other knights around him, in a very fierce encounter, and I do not think that any one of them, nor so much as the name of the fight, is now remembered. No, no, madam, the nearer you come to it, you see that death is a dark and dusty corner, where a man gets into his tomb and has the door shut after him till the judgment day. I have few friends just now, and once I am dead I shall have none."

"Ah, Monsieur de Beaulieu!" she exclaimed, "you forget Blanche de Malétroit."

"You have a sweet nature, madam, and you are pleased to estimate a little service far beyond its worth."

"It is not that," she answered. "You mistake me if you think I am easily touched by my own concerns. I say so, because you are the noblest man I have ever met; because I recognize in you a spirit that would have made even a common person famous in the land."

"And yet here I die in a mouse trap — with no more noise about it than my own squeaking," answered he.

A look of pain crossed her face, and she was silent for a little while. Then a light came into her eyes, and with a smile she spoke again.

"I cannot have my champion think meanly of

himself. Any one who gives his life for another will be met in paradise by all the heralds and angels of the Lord God. And you have no such cause to hang your head. For . . . pray, do you think me beautiful ? ” she asked, with a deep flush.

“ Indeed, madam, I do,” he said.

“ I am glad of that,” she answered heartily. “ Do you think there are many men in France who have been asked in marriage by a beautiful maiden — with her own lips — and who have refused her to her face ? I know you men would half despise such a triumph ; but believe me, we women know more of what is precious in love. There is nothing that should set a person higher in his own esteem ; and we women would prize nothing more dearly.”

“ You are very good,” he said ; “ but you cannot make me forget that I was asked in pity and not for love.”

“ I am not so sure of that,” she replied, holding down her head. “ Hear me to an end, Monsieur de Beaulieu. I know how you must despise me ; I feel you are right to do so ; I am too poor a creature to occupy one thought of your mind, although, alas ! you must die for me this morning. But when I asked you to marry me, indeed and indeed it was because I respected and admired you and loved you with my whole soul, from the very moment that you took my part against my

uncle. If you had seen yourself, and how noble you looked, you would pity rather than despise me. And now," she went on, hurriedly checking him with her hand, "although I have laid aside all reserve and told you so much, remember that I know your sentiments toward me already. I would not, believe me, being nobly born, weary you with importunities into consent. I, too, have a pride of my own ; and I declare before the holy mother of God, if you should now go back from your word already given, I would no more marry you than I would marry my uncle's groom."

Denis smiled a little bitterly.

"It is a small love," he said, "that shies at a little pride."

She made no answer, although she probably had her own thoughts.

"Come hither to the window," he said with a sigh. "Here is the dawn."

And indeed the dawn was already beginning. The hollow of the sky was full of essential daylight, colorless and clean ; and the valley underneath was flooded with a gray reflection. A few thin vapors clung in the coves of the forest or lay along the winding course of the river. The scene disengaged a surprising effect of stillness, which was hardly interrupted when the cocks began once more to crow among the steadings.¹ Perhaps the same fellow who had made so horrid

¹ A Scotch word for barns and out-houses.

a clangor in the darkness not half an hour before, now sent up the merriest cheer to greet the coming day. A little wind went bustling and eddying among the treetops underneath the windows. And still the daylight kept flooding insensibly out of the east, which was soon to grow incandescent and cast up that red-hot cannon ball, the rising sun.

Denis looked out over all this with a bit of a shiver. He had taken her hand and retained it in his almost unconsciously.

“Has the day begun already?” she said; and then, illogically enough, “the night has been so long! Alas! what shall we say to my uncle when he returns?”

“What you will,” said Denis, and he pressed her fingers in his.

She was silent.

“Blanche,” he said, with a swift, uncertain, passionate utterance, “you have seen whether I fear death. You must know well enough that I would as gladly leap out of that window into the empty air as to lay a finger on you without your free and full consent. But if you care for me at all do not let me lose my life in a misapprehension; for I love you better than the whole world; and though I will die for you blithely, it would be like all the joys of paradise to live on and spend my life in your service.”

As he stopped speaking, a bell began to ring

loudly in the interior of the house; and a clatter of armor in the corridor showed that the retainers were returning to their post, and the two hours were at an end.

"After all that you have heard?" she whispered, leaning toward him with her lips and eyes.

"I have heard nothing," he replied.

"The captain's name was Florimond de Champdivers," she said in his ear.

"I did not hear it," he answered, taking her supple body in his arms, and covering her wet face with kisses.

A melodious chirping was audible behind, followed by a beautiful chuckle, and the voice of Messire de Malétroit wished his new nephew a good-morning.

WEE WILLIE WINKIE

BY RUDYARD KIPLING

“An officer and a gentleman.”

HIS full name was Percival William Williams, but he picked up the other name in a nursery book, and that was the end of the christened titles. His mother's *ayah*¹ called him Willie-Baba,² but as he never paid the faintest attention to anything that the *ayah* said, her wisdom did not help matters.

His father was the Colonel of the 195th, and as soon as Wee Willie Winkie was old enough to understand what Military Discipline meant, Colonel Williams put him under it. There was no other way of managing the child. When he was good for a week, he drew good-conduct pay ; and when he was bad, he was deprived of his good-conduct stripe. Generally he was bad, for India offers so many chances to little six-year-olds of going wrong.

¹ Nurse. The word is picked up from the natives by the English in India, although, curiously enough, it is a word of European origin.

² An Oriental title of respect.

Children resent familiarity from strangers, and Wee Willie Winkie was a very particular child. Once he accepted an acquaintance, he was graciously pleased to thaw. He accepted Brandis, a subaltern¹ of the 195th, on sight. Brandis was having tea at the Colonel's, and Wee Willie Winkie entered strong in the possession of a good-conduct badge won for not chasing the hens round the compound.² He regarded Brandis with gravity for at least ten minutes, and then delivered himself of his opinion.

"I like you," said he, slowly, getting off his chair and coming over to Brandis. "I like you. I shall call you Copy, because of your hair. Do you *mind* being called Copy? it is because of ve hair you know."

Here was one of the most embarrassing of Wee Willie Winkie's peculiarities. He would look at a stranger for some time, and then, without warning or explanation, would give him a name. And the name stuck. No regimental penalties could break Wee Willie Winkie of this habit. He lost his good-conduct badge for christening the Commissioner's³ wife "Pobs"; but nothing that the Colonel could do made the Station⁴ forego the nickname, and Mrs. Collen remained Mrs. "Pobs"

¹ A commissioned officer below the rank of captain.

² The inclosure around the house.

³ The chief civil officer in a district of India.

⁴ One of the places in India where the executive officers of government have headquarters.

till the end of her stay. So Brandis was christened "Coppy," and rose, therefore, in the estimation of the regiment.

If Wee Willie Winkie took an interest in any one, the fortunate man was envied alike by the mess and the rank and file. And in their envy lay no suspicion of self-interest. "The Colonel's son" was idolized on his own merits entirely. Yet Wee Willie Winkie was not lovely. His face was permanently freckled, as his legs were permanently scratched, and in spite of his mother's almost tearful remonstrances he had insisted upon having his long yellow locks cut short in the military fashion. "I want my hair like Sergeant Tummil's," said Wee Willie Winkie, and, his father abetting, the sacrifice was accomplished.

Three weeks after the bestowal of his youthful affections on Lieutenant Brandis—henceforward to be called "Coppy" for the sake of brevity—Wee Willie Winkie was destined to behold strange things and far beyond his comprehension.

Coppy returned his liking with interest. Coppy had let him wear for five rapturous minutes his own big sword—just as tall as Wee Willie Winkie. Coppy had promised him a terrier puppy; and Coppy had permitted him to witness the miraculous operation of shaving. Nay, more—Coppy had said that even he, Wee Willie Winkie, would rise in time to the ownership of a box of shiny knives, a silver soap box and a silver-

handled "sputter-brush," as Wee Willie Winkie called it. Decidedly, there was no one except his father, who could give or take away good-conduct badges at pleasure, half so wise, strong, and valiant as Coppy with the Afghan and Egyptian medals on his breast. Why, then, should Coppy be guilty of the unmanly weakness of kissing — vehemently kissing — a "big girl," Miss Allardyce to wit, in the course of a morning ride? Wee Willie Winkie had seen Coppy so doing, and, like the gentleman he was, had promptly wheeled round and cantered back to his groom lest the groom should also see.

Under ordinary circumstances he would have spoken to his father, but he felt instinctively that this was a matter on which Coppy ought first to be consulted.

"Coppy," shouted Wee Willie Winkie, reining up outside that subaltern's bungalow early one morning¹ — "I want to see you, Coppy!"

"Come in, young 'un," returned Coppy, who was at early breakfast in the midst of his dogs. "What mischief have you been getting into now?"

Wee Willie Winkie had done nothing notoriously bad for three days, and so stood on a pinnacle of virtue.

"I've been doing nothing bad," said he, curling

¹ It is so hot in India that people have to get their exercise very early in the day.

himself into a long chair with a studious affectation of the Colonel's languor after a hot parade. He buried his nose in a teacup and, with eyes staring roundly over the rim, asked : "I say, Copy, is it pwoper to kiss big girls ?"

"By Jove ! You're beginning early. Who do you want to kiss ?"

"No one. My muvver's always kissing me if I don't stop her. If it isn't pwoper, how was you kissing Major Allardyce's big girl last morning, by ve canal ?"

Copy's brow wrinkled. He and Miss Allardyce had with great craft managed to keep their engagement secret for a fortnight. There were urgent and imperative reasons why Major Allardyce should not know how matters stood for at least another month, and this small marplot had discovered a great deal too much.

"I saw you," said Wee Willie Winkie, calmly. "But ve groom didn't see. I said, '*Hut jao.*'"¹

"Oh, you had that much sense, you young Rip," groaned poor Copy, half amused and half angry. "And how many people may you have told about it ?"

"Only me myself. You didn't tell when I twied to wide ve buffalo ven my pony was lame ; and I fought you wouldn't like."

"Winkie," said Copy, enthusiastically, shaking the small hand, "you're the best of good fellows.

¹ Here, as on p. 235, *jao* means "stop."

Look here, you can't understand all these things. One of these days — hang it, how can I make you see it ! — I'm going to marry Miss Allardyce, and then she'll be Mrs. Copy, as you say. If your young mind is so scandalized at the idea of kissing big girls, go and tell your father."

"What will happen ?" said Wee Willie Winkie, who firmly believed that his father was omnipotent.

"I shall get into trouble," said Copy, playing his trump card with an appealing look at the holder of the ace.

"Ven I won't," said Wee Willie Winkie, briefly. "But my faver says its un-man-ly to be always kissing, and I didn't fink *you'd* do vat, Copy."

"I'm not always kissing, old chap. It's only now and then, and when you're bigger you'll do it too. Your father meant it's not good for little boys."

"Ah !" said Wee Willie Winkie, now fully enlightened. "It's like ve sputter-brush ?"

"Exactly," said Copy, gravely.

"But I don't fink I'll ever want to kiss big girls, nor no one, 'cept my muvver. And I *must* do vat, you know."

There was a long pause, broken by Wee Willie Winkie.

"Are you fond of vis big girl, Copy ?"

"Awfully !" said Copy.

"Fonder van you are of Bell or ve Butcha — or me ?"

"It's in a different way," said Copy. "You see, one of these days Miss Allardyce will belong to me, but you'll grow up and command the Regiment and — all sorts of things. It's quite different, you see."

"Very well," said Wee Willie Winkie, rising. "If you're fond of ve big girl, I won't tell any one. I must go now."

Copy rose and escorted his small guest to the door, adding : " You're the best of little fellows, Winkie. I tell you what. In thirty days from now you can tell if you like — tell any one you like."

Thus the secret of the Brandis-Allardyce engagement was dependent on a little child's word. Copy, who knew Wee Willie Winkie's idea of truth, was at ease, for he felt that he would not break promises. Wee Willie Winkie betrayed a special and unusual interest in Miss Allardyce, and, slowly revolving round that embarrassed young lady, was used to regard her gravely with unwinking eye. He was trying to discover why Copy should have kissed her. She was not half so nice as his own mother. On the other hand, she was Copy's property, and would in time belong to him. Therefore it behooved him to treat her with as much respect as Copy's big sword or shiny pistol.

The idea that he shared a great secret in common with Copy kept Wee Willie Winkie unusually

virtuous for three weeks. Then the Old Adam broke out, and he made what he called a "camp fire" at the bottom of the garden. How could he have foreseen that the flying sparks would have lighted the Colonel's little hayrick and consumed a week's store for the horses? Sudden and swift was the punishment — deprivation of the good-conduct badge and, most sorrowful of all, two days confinement to barracks — the house and veranda — coupled with the withdrawal of the light of his father's countenance.

He took the sentence like the man he strove to be, drew himself up with a quivering underlip, saluted, and, once clear of the room, ran to weep bitterly in his nursery — called by him "my quarters." Copy came in the afternoon and attempted to console the culprit.

"I'm under awwest," said Wee Willie Winkie mournfully, "and I didn't ought to speak to you."

Very early the next morning he climbed on to the roof of the house — that was not forbidden — and beheld Miss Allardyce going for a ride.

"Where are you going?" cried Wee Willie Winkie.

"Across the river," she answered, and trotted forward.

Now the cantonment¹ in which the 195th lay was bounded on the north by a river — dry in the winter. From his earliest years, Wee Willie

¹ A place where soldiers are quartered.

Winkie had been forbidden to go across the river, and had noted that even Coppy—the almost almighty Coppy—had never set foot beyond it. Wee Willie Winkie had once been read to, out of a big blue book, the history of the Princess and the Goblins¹—a most wonderful tale of a land where the Goblins were always warring with the children of men until they were defeated by one Curdie. Ever since that date it seemed to him that the bare black and purple hills across the river were inhabited by Goblins, and, in truth, every one had said that there lived the Bad Men.² Even in his own house the lower halves of the windows were covered with green paper on account of the Bad Men who might, if allowed clear view, fire into peaceful drawing-rooms and comfortable bedrooms. Certainly, beyond the river, which was the end of all the Earth, lived the Bad Men. And here was Major Allardyce's big girl, Coppy's property, preparing to venture into their borders ! What would Coppy say if anything happened to her ? If the Goblins ran off with her as they did with Curdie's Princess ? She must at all hazards be turned back.

The house was still. Wee Willie Winkie reflected for a moment on the very terrible wrath of his father ; and then — broke his arrest !

¹ By George MacDonald.

² They were Pathans, of an Afghan tribe on the northwest border of British India.

It was a crime unspeakable. The low sun threw his shadow, very large and very black, on the trim garden-paths, as he went down to the stables and ordered his pony. It seemed to him in the hush of the dawn that all the big world had been bidden to stand still and look at Wee Willie Winkie guilty of mutiny. The drowsy *sais*¹ gave him his mount, and, since the one great sin made all others insignificant, Wee Willie Winkie said that he was going to ride over to Copy Sahib,² and went out at a footpace, stepping on the soft mold of the flower borders.

The devastating track of the pony's feet was the last misdeed that cut him off from all sympathy of Humanity. He turned into the road, leaned forward, and rode as fast as the pony could put foot to the ground in the direction of the river.

But the liveliest of twelve-two ponies can do little against the long canter of a Waler.³ Miss Allardyce was far ahead, had passed through the crops, beyond the Police-post, when all the guards were asleep, and her mount was scattering the pebbles of the river bed as Wee Willie Winkie left the cantonment and British India behind him. Bowed forward and still flogging, Wee Willie Winkie shot into Afghan territory, and could just see Miss Allardyce, a black speck, flickering across the stony plain. The reason of her wandering

¹ Groom.

² A title of respect, generally used in India for the English.

³ An Australian horse, called from New South Wales.

was simple enough. Copy, in a tone of too hastily assumed authority, had told her over night that she must not ride out by the river. And she had gone to prove her own spirit and teach Copy a lesson.

Almost at the foot of the inhospitable hills, Wee Willie Winkie saw the Waler blunder and come down heavily. Miss Allardyce struggled clear, but her ankle had been severely twisted, and she could not stand. Having thus demonstrated her spirit, she wept copiously, and was surprised by the apparition of a white, wide-eyed child in khaki, on a nearly spent pony.

"Are you badly, badly hurted?" shouted Wee Willie Winkie, as soon as he was within range.
"You didn't ought to be here."

"I don't know," said Miss Allardyce, ruefully, ignoring the reproof. "Good gracious, child, what are *you* doing here?"

"You said you was going acwoss ve wiver," panted Wee Wille Winkie, throwing himself off his pony. "And nobody—not even Copy—must go acwoss ve wiver, and I came after you ever so hard, but you wouldn't stop, and now you've hurted yourself, and Copy will be angwy wiv me, and—I've bwoken my awwest! I've bwoken my awwest!"

The future Colonel of the 195th sat down and sobbed. In spite of the pain in her ankle the girl was moved.

"Have you ridden all the way from cantonments, little man? What for?"

"You belonged to Copy. Copy told me so!" wailed Wee Willie Winkie, disconsolately. "I saw him kissing you, and he said he was fonder of you van Bell or ve Butcha or me. And so I came. You must get up and come back. You didn't ought to be here. Vis is a bad place, and I've bwoken my awwest."

"I can't move, Winkie," said Miss Allardyce, with a groan. "I've hurt my foot. What shall I do?"

She showed a readiness to weep afresh, which steadied Wee Willie Winkie, who had been brought up to believe that tears were the depth of unmanliness. Still, when one is as great a sinner as Wee Willie Winkie, even a man may be permitted to break down.

"Winkie," said Miss Allardyce, "when you've rested a little, ride back and tell them to send out something to carry me back in. It hurts fearfully."

The child sat still for a little time and Miss Allardyce closed her eyes; the pain was nearly making her faint. She was roused by Wee Willie Winkie tying up the reins on his pony's neck and setting it free with a vicious cut of his whip that made it whicker. The little animal headed towards the cantonments.

"Oh, Winkie! What are you doing?"

"Hush!" said Wee Willie Winkie. "Vere's a man coming — one of ve Bad Men. I must stay wiv you. My faver says a man must *always* look after a girl. Jack will go home, and ven vey'll come and look for us. Vat's why I let him go."

Not one man but two or three had appeared from behind the rocks of the hills, and the heart of Wee Willie Winkie sank within him, for just in this manner were the Goblins wont to steal out and vex Curdie's soul. Thus had they played in Curdie's garden, he had seen the picture, and thus had they frightened the Princess's nurse. He heard them talking to each other, and recognized with joy the bastard Pushto¹ that he had picked up from one of his father's grooms lately dismissed. People who spoke that tongue could not be the Bad Men. They were only natives after all.

They came up to the bowlders on which Miss Allardye's horse had blundered.

Then rose from the rock Wee Willie Winkie, child of the Dominant Race, aged six and three-quarters, and said briefly and emphatically "*Jao!*" The pony had crossed the river bed.

The men laughed, and laughter from natives was the one thing Wee Willie Winkle could not tolerate. He asked them what they wanted and why they did not depart. Other men with most evil faces and crooked-stocked guns crept out of the shadows of the hills, till, soon, Wee Willie Winkie

¹ The Afghan language.

was face to face with an audience some twenty strong. Miss Allardyce screamed.

“Who are you?” said one of the men.

“I am the Colonel Sahib’s son, and my order is that you go at once. You black men are frightening the Miss Sahib. One of you must run into cantonments and take the news that the Miss Sahib has hurt herself, and that the Colonel’s son is here with her.”

“Put our feet into the trap?” was the laughing reply. “Hear this boy’s speech!”

“Say that I sent you—I, the Colonel’s son. They will give you money.”

“What is the use of this talk? Take up the child and the girl, and we can at least ask for the ransom. Ours are the villages on the heights,” said a voice in the background.

These *were* the Bad Men—worse than Goblins—and it needed all Wee Willie Winkie’s training to prevent him from bursting into tears. But he felt that to cry before a native, excepting only his mother’s *ayah*, would be an infamy greater than any mutiny. Moreover, he, as future Colonel of the 195th, had that grim regiment at his back.

“Are you going to carry us away?” said Wee Willie Winkie, very blanched and uncomfortable.

“Yes, my little *Sahib Bahadur*,¹” said the tallest of the men, “and eat you afterwards.”

¹ A title of respect.

"That is child's talk," said Wee Willie Winkie.
"Men do not eat men."

A yell of laughter interrupted him, but he went on firmly,— "And if you do carry us away, I tell you that all my regiment will come up in a day and kill you all without leaving one. Who will take my message to the Colonel Sahib ?"

Speech in any vernacular—and Wee Willie Winkie had a colloquial acquaintance with three—was easy to the boy who could not yet manage his "r's" and "th's" aright.

Another man joined the conference, crying—"O foolish men! What this babe says is true. He is the heart's heart of those white troops. For the sake of peace let them go both, for if he be taken, the regiment will break loose and gut the valley. *Our* villages are in the valley, and we shall not escape. That regiment are devils. They broke Khoda Yar's breastbone with kicks when he tried to take the rifles; and if we touch this child they will fire and rape and plunder for a month, till nothing remains. Better to send a man back to take the message and get a reward. I say that this child is their God, and that they will spare none of us, nor our women, if we harm him."

It was Din Mahomed, the dismissed groom of the Colonel, who made the diversion, and an angry and heated discussion followed. Wee Willie Winkie, standing over Miss Allardyce,

waited the upshot. Surely his "wegment," his own "wegment," would not desert him if they knew of his extremity.

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The riderless pony brought the news to the 195th, though there had been consternation in the Colonel's household for an hour before. The little beast came in through the parade-ground in front of the main barracks, where the men were settling down to play Spoil-five till the afternoon. Devlin, the color Sergeant of E Company, glanced at the empty saddle and tumbled through the barracks-rooms, kicking up each Room Corporal as he passed, "Up, ye beggars ! There's something happened to the Colonel's son," he shouted.

"He couldn't fall off ! S'elp me 'e *couldn't* fall off," blubbered a drummer-boy.

"Go an' hunt across the river. He's over there if he's anywhere, an' maybe those Pathons have got 'im. For the love o' Gawd don't look for 'im in the nullahs !¹ Let's go over the river."

"There's sense in Mott yet," said Devlin. "E Company, double out to the river — sharp ! "

So E Company, in its shirt sleeves mainly, double for the dear life, and in the rear toiled the perspiring Sergeant, adjuring it to double yet faster. The cantonment was alive with the men of the 195th hunting for Wee Willie Winkie, and the Colonel finally overtook E Company,

¹ Dry ravines.

far too exhausted to swear, struggling in the pebbles of the river bed.

Up the hill under which Wee Willie Winkie's Bad Men were discussing the wisdom of carrying off the child and the girl, a lookout fired two shots.

"What have I said!" shouted Din Mahomed. "There is the warning! The *pulton* are out already and are coming across the plain! Get away! Let us not be seen with the boy."

The men waited for an instant, and then, as another shot was fired, withdrew into the hills, silently as they had appeared.

"The wegment is coming," said Wee Willie Winkie, confidently, to Miss Allardyce, "and it's all wight. Don't cwy!"

He needed the advice himself, for ten minutes later, when his father came up, he was weeping bitterly, with his head in Miss Allardyce's lap.

And the men of the 195th carried him home with shouts and rejoicings; and Copy, who had ridden a horse into a lather, met him, and, to his intense disgust, kissed him openly in the presence of the men.

But there was balm for his dignity. His father assured him that not only would the breaking of arrest be condoned, but that the good-conduct badge would be restored as soon as his mother could sew it on his blouse-sleeve. Miss Allardyce had told the Colonel a story that made him proud of his son.

"She belonged to you, Coppy," said Wee Willie Winkie, indicating Miss Allardyce with a grimy forefinger. "I *knew* she didn't ought to go awoss ve wiver, and I knew ve wegiment would come to me if I sent Jack home."

"You're a hero, Winkie," said Coppy — "a *pukka* hero!"

"I don't know what vat means," said Wee Willie Winkie, "but you mustn't call me Winkie, any no more. I'm Percival Will'am Will'ams."

And in this manner did Wee Willie Winkie enter into his manhood.















